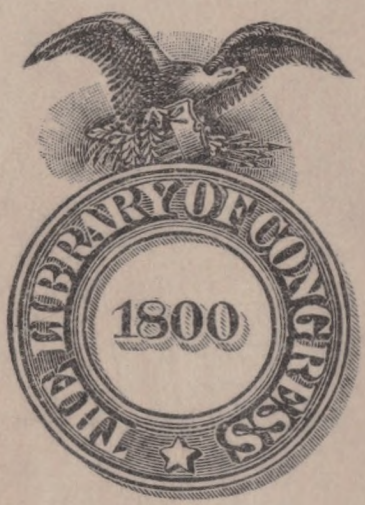
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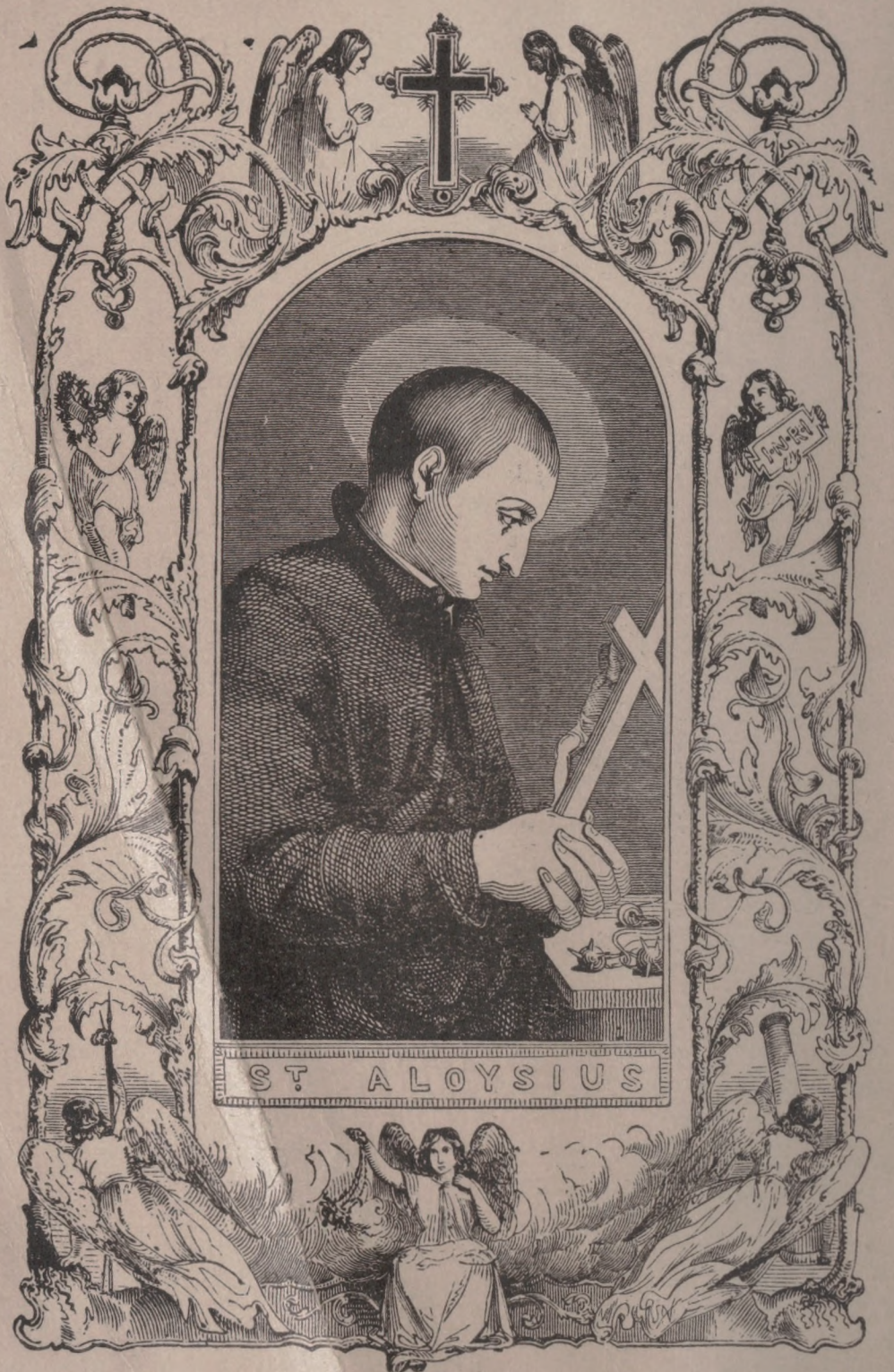


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THE HAMILTONS;

OR,

SUNSHINE IN STORM

BY

CORA BERKLEY



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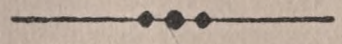
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PREFACE.



This little book is intended to illustrate the strength, the beauty, and the purity of a true Catholic heart, whether in prosperity or in adversity; and the noiseless, yet almost irresistible influence it may acquire over those who come within its sphere. The author believes that the deep, tender piety of Catholicity, with its unselfishness, its childlike repose in the will of God, is fully equal to all the emergencies of the most eventful life. In the following pages

the author has attempted to show how the deepest piety is not incompatible with the most brilliant success in every sphere of life. If the attempt is a successful one, she will have attained her object ; if not, she is content to have this little work added to the great list of failures and disappointments with which the world is full.

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THE HAMILTONS;

OR,

SUNSHINE IN STORM

I.

ENTRANCE INTO SOCIETY.

It was snowing when Margaret Hamilton put her head out of the stage window, as it stopped for a moment on one of the high hills just opposite Cincinnati, to get a glimpse of her home. But the white flakes, falling thick and fast, spread a misty veil over the river, flowing far below, and the city beyond, and dimmed the outline of the distant hills, standing, like sentinels, around. In a little while she was at her father's door.

Her step-mother, in a gay dressing gown, ran down to meet her.

"Marguerite, I thought you would have been here yesterday. It is very awkward! Of course you have nothing fit to wear, and the whole town will be here to-night."

She hurried her up stairs, just suffering her to pass into the handsome parlor, talking rapidly all the time of something that seemed to be very momentous to her, but which Margaret did not at all understand. "Why on earth were you not here yesterday? I have the loveliest blue satin ready, but I am afraid it will not fit. Let me see what you have. Florine, unstrap that trunk."

The French maid drew out one by one the simple Convent dresses, while Margaret asked, "What does it all mean, mother? How are papa and Fred?"

"Do not call me mother," said Mrs. Hamilton. "I am young enough yet to be

taken for your sister. If you set the example, Fred will be 'mothering' me, if only for the sake of tormenting me."

Margaret looked relieved. It had ever been a pang to give the proud, cold Hortensia Hamilton, a name that belonged to one so different. "Then I'll call you Hortense. This is my gala costume." She held up an unassuming white Swiss, and a wreath of delicate artificials, but dropped them to laugh at the maid's look of horror. "Why must I dress to-night?"

"Because you are to make your *debut* under my auspices," said Mrs. Hamilton. "Don't you remember I wrote to you about it? Florine, we must try the blue satin."

"Is it for me? O Hortense! I have not worn colors since—" She hesitated, and bent down over her scattered wardrobe.

"Since your mother's death," said Hortense, with the greatest indifference. "But that was four years ago, and it is time to

leave off your mourning. Ah! here it is." Margaret suffered them to put the dress on her, but silently resolved not to wear it. "How very lovely you are!" was the usually undemonstrative Mrs. Hamilton's exclamation, as she smoothed the rich folds, and drew up the lace on the sleeves, to display the beautifully moulded arms. She was, indeed, lovely; her face radiant as the morning with its blushes,—her tender eyes suffused with the unshed tears her mother's name had called up,—and the white drooping shoulders, and fair round arm, looking but the fairer against the delicate-hued satin.

"Now I will leave you for a little while," said Hortense, "and as soon as Florine has finished my hair, she shall put up yours. Come, Florine. I'll send for you presently, Marguerite." It was one of her affectations to call her by this French name; Margaret, she said, was harsh, and its abbreviations too common.

Hortense's presently proved to be an hour; and before that had passed, Margaret was dressed, certainly looking purer in her simple white robe, closed at the throat with a jet cross, and girdled with black, than any of the overdressed belles who would grace Hortense's parlor that night. The French maid bestowed upon her a very supercilious glance as she glided into Mrs. Hamilton's room, and Hortense herself looked unutterable scorn. "Marguerite, you surely do not intend to make your appearance in such a trim! It is preposterous to cover up a neck like yours. Really, I will not go down with you, if you do not wear the blue."

"Oh yes, you will; I do not think I'll prove a very great disgrace, for I expect to play wall flower," she answered, lightly.

"Indeed, you will do no such thing. You must talk, Marguerite, and laugh, for it is very becoming to you. And so are

blushes," she added, as Margaret's heightened color told how unused she was to such lessons.

"But I cannot talk well to strangers, and I don't think my first attempt in society will be much of a triumph. Tell me about papa and Fred; are they at home? I want so much to see them."

"Do not make yourself uneasy about either, for it is not probable that they will be visible to-night," said Hortense, dryly. "Mr. Hamilton, senior, dislikes gay assemblages, and Mr. Hamilton, junior, cares for nothing but——" Upon what his affections were placed she did not hear, for she was folded in her father's arms.

"Margaret! my little Margaret, how you have grown!" He could say no more, but kept her in a close embrace, repeatedly kissing her. Hortense turned away to finish her toilette, leaving the two to study the changes years had made in each. The face

that bent so tenderly over Margaret was not like that she had known in childhood; there was a shadow on the brow, and a resolute pressure of the lips, that quite changed its expression. In a little while Mr. Hamilton turned to his wife, with a look that puzzled Margaret. "Hortense, do excuse us to-night. Margaret, I am sure, would rather remain with me than go down to those heartless people you expect."

"As you please," she answered, coldly. "I expect none but friends whom I have invited for Marguerite's sake, but if you do not wish your daughter to associate with them, I have nothing more to say."

"Your friends! They are heartless, nevertheless," he said, with a smothered sigh, as he turned again to his child. "They will make you like them, Margaret! Do not leave me! Stay here!"

How imploring his voice was! Margaret had a childish curiosity to see the gay

world of society, of which Hortense had given her such brilliant descriptions; but his words filled her with misgiving. "Indeed, papa, I would like to stay with you; I have so much to say, so many things to—"

"Nonsense, Marguerite!" interrupted Hortense. "Mr. Hamilton, you did a very foolish thing in sending her to a Catholic Convent, to have her head filled with prudish notions, don't do another by keeping her out of society longer. Look, Marguerite, if that is a face to be hidden."

She turned her around to the long mirror and stood beside her, while, with flushed cheeks, Margaret glanced at the reflection. There could not have been a greater contrast than the two. Hortense's was a dark, colorless face, heavy in its repose, and only lighted by a pair of black eyes, that had been taught to flash or soften as their owner willed; while Margaret's flushed and

paled with every passing thought. At first glance she might have been pronounced the haughtiest of the two, for there was a stately grace in her finely developed figure, and the peculiar turn of her white slender throat, which Hortense lacked; but a moment's study of the delicately chiselled features removed that impression. Their dress, too, increased the contrast; Hortense's gorgeous as an Indian queen's, and Margaret's almost quakerish in its simplicity. Mr. Hamilton watched them silently until his wife placed her hand upon his arm, and with a smile that would have sent him to the end of the earth had she asked it, said:

"Now, Robert, be sensible, and let me do as I please with Marguerite. I promise you that you will be proud of my management."

It was almost the first time since their marriage that she had called him Robert,

and that alone would have won him. "Do not spoil her, Hortense ; do not make her worldly, and you can do what else you please."

She drew back with an assumed look of resentment. "Then you think me worldly ; you think I would corrupt her. O Robert !"

He gently removed the hands she pressed upon her eyes. "Do not misunderstand me, Hortense ; let us be friends, at least." She suffered herself to be petted into a good humor, and then went to Margaret, who was at the fire, watching them with a puzzled look. "Let me put these camellias in your hair, Marguerite ; Etienne will admire them." She knelt down ; and while Hortense placed the waxlike flowers in the coronal of hair resting on her white brow, asked,

"Who is Etienne ?"

"Some one worth pleasing. Come, it is time to go down." They went, Hortense

only lingering a moment to have a quiet laugh, and say in French to her maid, "Am I not a superb actress? I shall have my pretty step-daughter in my own hands now." In the parlor the child, as Hortense called her, could not be still. She went about the room fluttering over the leaves of books, and rearranging flowers that were too stiffly disposed in their vases. Hortense in vain tried to give her some lessons in etiquette; she only sealed her lips with kisses and laughter, such a ringing, musical laugh as was seldom heard in those gorgeous rooms, and tripped away again, exclaiming she was too happy to do any thing but shout and make speeches. Happy, happy Margaret! It seemed as if every pulsation of her heart was a whole life of joy, a joy so great that it could not be hidden away in its recesses, but stole up to her sweet young face and lit it with something akin to a halo, and

rang out like a glad chime in every tone of her voice.

"You are the veriest child I ever knew," said Hortense, with a curl of her haughty lip "I am afraid I shall never succeed in teaching you presentable manners."

Margaret put up her hands in comic distress, "In what am I so very childish?"

"Various things, too numerous to mention," she answered dryly, turning to the mirror between the windows, and settling the plumes in her hair. "Really, Margaret, you are as wild as a deer. What has put you into such a gale?"

"Gale!" she repeated with a burst of laughter. "Why this is my ordinary mood, Mrs. Hamilton; I generally feel so light, it would not be hard for me to fancy that wings were growing on my shoulders. It has been so, ever since the day I was baptized. Do you know, papa," she continued, more seriously, "I was very much afraid

when I wrote to ask your permission, you would object to my becoming a Catholic. Ah! In what trembling suspense the days were passed until your answer came. Dear papa, I cannot thank you enough for your unreserved consent."

"Even though you had not a chance to play heroism, and brave my displeasure, and finally wring an unwilling acquiescence from me by your lofty independence," said her father, with a smile. "Romantic young ladies generally like to be placed in predicaments."

"Do they?" she asked, gayly. "Then I surely am not romantic, for I should have been very much troubled at any thing like a predicament. It was very sweet, papa, to know that while I was doing that which I was sure would please God, I was not displeasing you." Again Hortense's lip curled, but she had no time for reproof, for her guests were beginning to arrive,

and Margaret's natural timidity somewhat quieted her flow of spirits. She stood beside Hortense with graceful, shrinking modesty, listening and talking to those who were presented. But later in the evening she went to a quiet corner, where her father had stationed himself, and while enjoying the gay scene before her, and watching the dancers in their many-colored costumes asked for her brother. A look of pain contracted Mr. Hamilton's brow as he answered hurriedly :

"He is very well, I believe. Yes, there he is." He came towards them with the graceful bearing that made him so like his sister, but she was shocked at his changed appearance, at the keen, cold gaze, and haggard cheeks that met her eyes. A vague fear that there was some cause for this, embarrassed her for a moment. He seemed to divine her thoughts, and said with a sarcastic smile :

"Margaret, are you frightened that you are so silent and stare at me so?"

"No, Fred! You are certainly changed, but I suppose I am too," she said, laughing at the momentary feeling that had overcome her.

"Yes, for the better. All the men in the room looked envious as I kissed you. Look! There goes Lamar, who is just now the lion of Hortense's set. You will rave about him like the rest of course."

"No, I'm not in the habit of raving about people. Who is he?"

"A rich Southerner whom all the Cincinnati girls are trying to catch. Very uselessly, I think, for I know by Hortense's manœuvres, that she intends you to be the victor, and bear off the prize. He is visiting her, so you will have a fair chance of playing off your attractions."

Before her blush had faded, Hortense advanced leaning on Mr. Lamar's arm, and

introduced him as the Etienne she had been speaking of that evening. She was too much confused by Fred's last remark to hear any thing for a few moments, but as self-possession returned, she ventured to glance at her companion. He had just such a face as she fancied might have belonged to Ignatius Loyola, before grace had subdued his fiery nature. It was dark and glowing with the hot blood of the South, the magnificent head upraised with the pride of conscious intellect, and the deep-set eyes looking as if the lightning of anger might often flash from their depths, though, now that they were bent down upon her, the heavy Spanish lashes shaded, and gave them a peculiar tender expression. It was not long before Margaret was listening to him with eager pleasure, and talking with a frankness that astonished herself. He seemed to have the talent of drawing out her opinion upon subjects most people would

have thought her unacquainted with, and unconscious that she was attracting attention, and exciting envy, she spent the whole evening at Mr. Lamar's side instead of dancing. Fred smiled significantly as he glanced at her animated face, and whispered in her ear, "Why, little sis, you can out-general Hortense any day." It recalled her to herself, and all Etienne's endeavors to sustain the conversation were vain.

II.

RETROSPECT—"FAST" ACQUAINTANCES.

MARGARET had not been long at home before she discovered that it was not a very happy one for her father. She was often pained by the look of comfortless sorrow that seemed to be settling on his face, and then almost unconsciously she would picture to herself the quiet homelike rooms of the old house, and a fragile form gliding about in the soft twilight, and loving hands drawing up the great arm-chair, and arranging the study lamp, and the dear old books. Her eyes would grow dim as she thought of her mother's wan cheeks flush-

ing at the sound of her father's footsteps, and her vain endeavors to choke down a cough, that she might sing the songs he loved. Those were happy days indeed, and Margaret could not help sighing that the present was not more like the past. Mr. Hamilton's second wife was a cold, haughty woman, and as heartless a schemer as ever did credit to the world's training. She had once said, "I would rather die than be poor," and well she played her cards to win the wealth she coveted. She knew the Hamiltons during the life of the first wife, and what little of affection there was in her nature was given to the warm-hearted, impulsive little Margaret; and after her mother's death, she took charge of her, until Mr. Hamilton's grief had somewhat subsided. Cutting remarks and sneering surmises as to her motives were not wanting, but Hortense was very heedless of them. Perhaps they were unjust; she

might have been for once false to her nature, but people doubted it. Her most intimate friends, or rather associates, for she had no friends, could read nothing in the haughty indifference with which she veiled her intentions. Her very looks were that. Never was there a more impenetrable face when she chose it to be so, and no wonder, for she had spent her life in training it, and only the thin lip, that would sometimes curl in spite of her, betrayed her utter contempt for the opinions of others, provided her own ends were gained.

Three years passed, and Hortense, as Robert Hamilton's wife, had wealth enough at her command to further any schemes her busy brain might invent. It was no wonder that Mr. Hamilton was disappointed in this second marriage. His happiness was centred in home, and Hortense had never cared for any thing but society. It was only in a crowd that her talents for de-

ception had full play, that her haughty will could gain the homage it craved. In the ball-room, and amid the votaries of fashion, she reigned supreme. Mrs. Hamilton's dress and manners, and beauty, were quoted as standards on all occasions; and many a heart-ache she had caused, were but marks of her "superior intellect," as it was termed. After the first months of their marriage, her husband seldom went out with her, unless Hortense condescended to invite him. Strange that with her glaring faults she had obtained unbounded influence over him; and if sometimes his nature revolted against the ignoble bondage, an assumption of tenderness on her part was sure to subdue him. She led him as she willed, even into the fashionable dissipation he so detested. He had been reserved and cautious all his life in his intercourse with society, not because he had suffered any wrong from it, but because his

tastes ran in a different channel, and with his children and his books he was content. The first were not much solace now, for Frederick, the eldest, had fallen into other hands, and Margaret was at school. Mrs. Hamilton, when dying, had implored her husband to place Margaret with the sisters at Nazareth until she was grown. She was not a Catholic, but one of those gentle, loveable women, who are most apt to yield to Catholic influence. Unfortunately for her she was not placed within its reach, and yet when about to leave the world, something whispered that the Convent walls would interpose between Margaret and many an evil if she could place her within them. And so Robert promised that it should be done; and when the coffin had hid for ever from sight his wife's meek face, and the clods were resting heavily upon it, he took his child to the sisters. She was very loath to stay at first, but her heart

was soon won. Dear old Nazareth! Many a time in after years, when sorrows gathered thick around her, her heart went back to the quiet, happy place, and grew faint with longing to dwell there once more.

Now that her own fate was settled, Hortense grew restless for an object to gain, and determined that Margaret should be sent for. She had given great promise of beauty, and Mrs. Hamilton was sure she would create a sensation, and make a splendid marriage; at least, she resolved that all her own art should be put in play for that purpose. How many airy castles she was never to inhabit were reared for the unconscious Margaret! Her earnest entreaties to remain a year longer were not to be withstood; and as she was but fifteen, Hortense yielded. It was a very unusual thing. During the last year of her stay at Nazareth, Margaret became a Catholic; and although the old Convent grew dearer after

that, she obeyed her father's summons home. But it was not to the home of her childhood that she was welcomed; that, with its low quaint rooms, and overshadowing trees, had been exchanged for a more costly dwelling in the fashionable part of the city. For a while after her arrival she was kept in a perfect whirl of pleasure, and young and unsuspicious as she was, it could scarce be that she would not enjoy it. The world was very bright and beautiful to her, for she saw it through the soft atmosphere that surrounded herself; looked upon it only as the reflection of heaven, and so she moved in it, joyous and untroubled; her purity and simplicity unsullied by its foul breath,—her heart unwavering in its allegiance to truth. But by and by a sense of weariness and dissatisfaction began to mar her pleasure. She did not discover the hypocrisy which fair exteriors veil, nor the suffering hidden under the mask of mirth,

but fervent and true-hearted in her catholicity, she could not but feel that she was robbing God of much time devoted to frivolous amusements. And then her father seldom accompanied Mrs. Hamilton and herself, and she could not bear the idea of leaving him alone in the long winter evenings. She was glad when Advent came, that she might have a good excuse for remaining with him. Hortense at first remonstrated, and tried to shake her resolution of giving up parties for a month at least, but was quickly silenced when she discovered that Mr. Lamar, who had been her guest ever since Margaret's arrival, spent most of his time with her. They were very good friends from the beginning, but Margaret, in her simplicity, never dreamed that she was encouraging a deeper feeling. But it was really so, and Hortense was well pleased that for once her art would not be requisite to bring a suitor to

the point. All that was necessary for her to do was to keep others from interfering with them; and she felt quite sufficient for that task, much as he was sought after. He was wealthy, intellectual, and descended from one of the old families, who had emigrated to Louisiana when the famous Mississippi scheme was filling France with gorgeous dreams, that were doomed to disappointment; and Mrs. Hamilton determined that Margaret should accept him: whether she loved him or not was quite a secondary matter.

In all this time Margaret saw little of her brother, except at table, and then it was evident he was not a favorite in the family. There was a contstant warfare of keen, sarcastic words, waged between him and Mrs. Hamilton, and his father always wore a cloudy, half-angry, half-sorrowful look when he was present. Margaret in vain tried to fathom the cause of all this. It was

from Frederick himself she first learnt it. He followed her to her room one day after dinner, and carefully closing the door, sat down by the fire.

Margaret playfully pushed up a stool for his feet, and offered to go in search of cigars. "For you know, Fred, this is the first time you have honored me with a visit, and I'll put up with any thing, even tobacco smoke, to keep you." He did not speak, but sat moodily gazing into the fire.

"Has your lordship any special message to deliver? Do not, I pray you, be entirely overwhelmed by the majesty of our royal presence."

He pushed the stool away, and grasping her slender waist until she almost cried aloud with pain, exclaimed hoarsely, "Margaret, cease your child's play. I have come to you as my last resource. I am ruined, and you must help me." There was such bitter

emphasis in his voice, such a fierce light in his eyes, that she was frightened.

"Help you! How, brother?"

"How pale you are! Sit down, I did not mean to frighten you. I must have five hundred dollars by night, and you are the only person who can get it for me. "Will you do it?"

"How? What for?" stammered Margaret, more bewildered still.

"Don't faint and I'll tell you. You shall know the whole affair by"—— He uttered an oath that made Margaret spring to her feet, and cover her face with her hands.

"O brother! brother! This is awful. Never speak so again."

He laughed scornfully. "What a tender-hearted little puss it is! Why, I was a whole hour storming at Hortense this morning, and she only looked at me with those great, passionless eyes of hers, until I was mad with rage." He gnashed his teeth on

the very remembrance of it. "I humbled myself to her, but she would not have pity." Margaret was weeping bitterly, and he went on in a quieter voice: "Last night I gambled away every cent I had in the world; and old Hamilton (he never called him father now) has positively refused to give me any thing; but you can get whatever you ask, Maggie."

"O Frederick! brother! how could you do so?" she asked with choking sobs. "It is an awful sin; you will never do it again, will you? Tell me it is the first and last time." He was silent; and then with a startled look, as a sudden conviction that he had long been leading a gambler's life flashed upon her, she seized his hands: "Promise, dear brother, that you will do so no more; promise!"

"What would you have me do?" he asked pettishly, "I cannot desert my friends, I cannot give up my only amusement."

She was quiet now from excessive emotion, and sat down beside him. "Tell me, Frederick, how you came to love this amusement, as you call it. It is such a perilous one."

There was no resisting the gentle tenderness of her voice and manner, and after a moment's pause he said: "Yes! I will tell you, Margaret. But do not start, do not hate me for my wickedness. If Hortense had never darkened my path, we might all be happy now, as we were long ago. Do you not see, Margaret, that she has brought misery into the house, that she it is who has cast a blight over all our fair prospects? I loved that woman once, Margaret, with all my soul I loved her, and, base hypocrite that she is, she told me that I alone of all the world possessed her heart; that was when you first went to Nazareth, and I was but twenty, young and foolish enough to be-

lieve her artful protestations. But by and by my father—curses on—

A little white hand was placed upon his lips, that the fearful words might not come forth, and the soft, clear voice of his sister, lulled the rising storm of passion.

"Well! well!" he continued, "let it pass. He came to Hortense with his wealth, and his high position, and she, woman-like, deserted me for him. Wealth was placed within her grasp, and she could not wait until I made her a fortune, but took the easiest way of making sure of one." He laughed bitterly, while Margaret, stifling her own emotion, replied,

"But, Fred, this is not what I asked. How did you—"

"Become a gambler," he said fiercely, as she hesitated. "Don't mince your words, Margaret. Do you think I could stand quietly by, and see her marry another, and that other, my father? It would have

driven me mad,—I sometimes believe I am mad now,—and so I went about reckless of life and reputation, and fell in with companions who first led me astray. It was a fascinating excitement from the very beginning, and drove away the thought of Hortense's perfidy; and now it has grown a necessity with me. I cannot choose, but indulge my passion for play."

"Oh yes, you can, brother," she said, quietly. "Leave all these bad associates. Stay with papa and me. Ah, if Hortense is what you say she is, he is surely to be pitied, and we should at least be a comfort to him. Why should you do wrong, dear brother, because she has wronged you? Leave judgment to the God of heaven; let her enjoy, if she can, the wealth she has so ignobly bought, and you and I, Fred, can be so happy together. Promise me that you will gamble no more!"

"I cannot, Margaret. I could not remain

long beneath the roof that shelters her. She would set me wild with her cold, prim looks, and cutting words. You do not know Hortense Hamilton. She is a very demon in woman's form."

"You are pleased to be complimentary, sir," said a calm, clear voice, behind them. Neither had seen Mrs. Hamilton enter. "If I had thought you capable of such meanness as to disturb this child with your passion, I should have prevented the possibility of your doing so."

His face grew livid with rage. "She is my sister, and I will come to her when I choose. Who are you, that you should make terms in this house? An upstart, who married for money; a base—" Again Margaret's hand was on his lips, and her voice, soft and caressing, drowned his, harsh and angry as it was. "Hortense, please leave us; I want to speak to my brother."

"No, I shall stay until the gentleman

leaves. I do not wish him to unmask himself completely to you; it would alarm you."

"Unmask you, Hortense, you mean," he replied, with his usual quiet sarcasm of manner. "Well! be it so. Margaret, will you do what I have asked?"

"I cannot, unless you promise that it will be the last time. Brother, you do not know what you are doing. Have you no regard for your own soul? Oh, say that you will never commit this sin again."

"I don't know that my soul is of much consequence," he said, roughly; "but if you will get the money I want, I will promise any thing and every thing."

"Even to desert your bad companions, and give up gambling?"

"Yes, yes! any thing," he said.

A sudden light flashed over her face, and the tears that had been startled back

to their source dimmed her eyes, as she turned to go to her father.

"Frederick, there is little use in quarrelling with me," said Mrs. Hamilton, when she was gone. "You know very well—although you may sneer at the idea—you know that I am mistress here; that I could this very moment prevent Mr. Hamilton from giving Margaret the money you want. It would be better for you to court my friendship."

"Would it?" he asked. "Pardon me, Mrs. Hamilton; I was so unsuccessful when I last paid my court to you, that I am afraid to try again."

"Do not be for ever harping on the past," she continued, heedless of his ironical interruption. "It can do no good. I bear you no ill-will, and if you will trust me I can help you."

He paused a moment, and then asked how. "I believe you have no objection to

wealth," she said, with a cold smile; "and I believe I can help you to a fortune, but you must take a wife with it. You know my cousin, Alice Dalton, has been left quite a handsome fortune. She will be of age next spring; and if you only set to work in earnest, you can gain her affections. She's a foolish little thing, and vows she will only marry for love; and then her purse will be at your service."

"You think we can manage it?" he exclaimed. "Hortense! you are the cleverest woman in Cincinnati. Well! here is my hand. I think we must be friends now, as we are both sworn to play the same part. I'm not going to fall in love with her, if I *do* act the lover."

"Very well! do that, and I will manage the rest."

How much to her own and Frederick's satisfaction she *did* manage it, poor Alice Dalton found to her cost. Hortense was

gone when Margaret returned, and silently placed a check in her brother's hand. "What did the old miser say? You did not tell him it was for me?"

"Certainly I did," she answered, with a look of amazement. "I would not dream of asking so much for myself. He gave it willingly when I told him you would never have occasion to ask for more."

"Margaret Hamilton! What a piece of simplicity you are! Hortense will have to drill you well before she teaches you to distrust people." It was all the thanks she got. He went away with a harsh, grating laugh, while she sat down to think of all she had heard.

III.

NEW-YEAR'S EVE.

MARGARET'S spirits were a little subdued after her brother's revelation, but they soon rose again. She was too unsuspicious to think he was deceiving her; and after a hearty burst of sorrow at the foot of the altar—for to the true friend ever there she carried every pain and pleasure—the happy feeling, so habitual to her, returned. She was a very child basking in the sunshine, and only wondering that it should be so bright. She lived in a kind of joyful amazement at her own happiness, at God's infinite mercy and goodness in having made

her a Catholic; and it was this that gave her character such an incomprehensible cast to those around her. How could Hortense understand it, or even her father, good and gentle as he was, or Fred, with his recklessness? This was the only thought that troubled her in the least, the certainty that they did not know now, and the possibility that they might never know, the truth. But with the perfect trust of Love she left it in the hands of God, only doing her utmost toward the attainment of her wishes by the sweet persuasion of example, and the most earnest prayers. Sometimes she feared that Frederick was pursuing his old course, but that fear was too vague to disturb her serenity much.

It was the last night of the year; and worn out with a month's unceasing dissipation, Hortense signified her intention of remaining home. The curtains were closed, the fire blazing cheerily, and for the first

time this winter, Mr. Hamilton and his family were gathered together around the hearth. Alice Dalton, too, was there, and Fred assumed an air of devotion he was far from feeling. Hortense smiled contemptuously as she lay amid the pillows of the lounge, for she saw through the mask he was wearing. *She* knew very well that he was about to do that which he had so bitterly condemned in her—marry for money; that affection for the pale, delicate-looking girl, who listened with such earnestness to his whispered words, had little to do with it. Margaret was industriously embroidering a stole she intended presenting to the bishop, while Mr. Lamar watched her fingers as they rapidly drew in and out the brilliant silks. She was very quiet that evening, for she was going to communion in the morning, and her own thoughts were pleasant companions. Etienne guessed as much from her smiling down look, and contented

himself with studying the bright face that was daily growing dearer to him.

"You are all very entertaining, I am sure," said Hortense from her lounge. "What are you dreaming of, Marguerite?"

"Not dreaming at all, but thinking of something deliciously real."

"Indeed! And what may that be? Etienne, ask her; she is more in the habit of obeying you than me."

"I don't think I shall obey either just now. Papa, what are you reading that makes you look so sober?" He was too abstracted to hear her, and presently got up with a weary look, and went out. Margaret glanced at the book he had been bending over, and, to her surprise, found that it was a ledger, filled with long lines of figures. There was another long silence; Margaret busily sewing, and Alice sorting her silks, that she might work the faster.

"Where do you suppose we will all be by this time next year?" asked Frederick, abruptly rising and going over to Hortense.

"Are you asking me?" said Mrs. Hamilton. "I think I'll be exactly where I am now,—that is, if I am just as tired as now. Alice will be married, and Marguerite!—really, my dear, I have not an idea what is to become of you and Mr. Lamar."

"Have not you? That is very wonderful," said Margaret, with a laugh, "considering you are such a seer."

"I can tell where I would like to be," said Etienne, glancing at Margaret, and then to Hortense. Margaret was serious again: "I don't know," she said, as if talking to herself, "but I think every one must feel a little sad at these times: don't you, Mr. Lamar?"

"Why do you ask Etienne alone?" said Fred, with his sneering laugh. "I suppose you think Hortense and I have caught

stony-heartedness from each other. I believe we are a little flinty, are we not, Hortense?"

"Ask Alice what she thinks of you. It makes no difference what I am."

Miss Dalton's pale cheeks flushed for a moment, as she answered in a quick, low tone, "Oh, do not ask my opinion,—you might think it presumptuous." Mrs. Hamilton glanced at Frederick, but her cold, keen look, was returned with interest.

"If all my New-year's Eves were spent as pleasantly as this," said Mr. Lamar, "I should think myself very happy."

"Would you?" answered Margaret. "Yes, it *is* pleasant. But then I think we all have something to regret in the past. There are always some misdeeds to mar the perfection we meant the year to bring forth. Always some evil done that lays like a dark stain on the fair fabric we intended to be so spotless; some unaccomplished good that

breaks the warp, and leaves an unfilled space. Do you not feel that?"

"Yes, but not in the way you do," he answered. "Disgust for the self-deception almost all people practise, for the ungenerous weakness that shrinks from the accomplishment of resolutions made in some moment of enthusiasm, has quite as great a share as sorrow in my feelings."

"But that is pride," she said, with a quick decision of manner that was natural to her when talking of any thing upon which her own opinions were perfectly settled. "You know we ought never to be astonished at any amount of weakness in ourselves, but rather wonder that we do no worse."

"Are you going to open a new school of Theology, Madge?" asked her brother. "I have some idea of studying, and might gain a degree under your learned tutorship."

Mr. Lamar's grave voice was musical

after that hard, mocking one: "That must be a very hard lesson to learn. I am afraid, Miss Hamilton, you will not find many to agree with you on that point."

"You are mistaken. All Catholics agree with me, or rather," she added, with a blush at her apparent presumption, "I agree with all Catholics. If the church did not teach it, perhaps it would be a hard lesson to learn; but our good Mother makes it easy enough."

"How?" he asked, with no little interest.

"How!" she repeated, the flush rising in her cheeks, and her fingers ceasing their quick play. "By showing us what we really are when guided by our own evil natures, as all must be who are deserted by grace."

"But it is said that self-confidence is a mark of true greatness," said Etienne, gently; "that the timid and distrustful are ever unsuccessful."

"Yes, in worldly affairs," she said, with a slight tremor in her voice; "in buying and selling, and hoarding up wealth. But the greatness which self-reliance alone makes is not true greatness. On the contrary, that pride which boasts of its own sufficiency is just what will soonest unthrone the intellect, and corrupt the heart. Show me, among all who have lived, a nobler being than St. Peter; and yet, in a moment of proud self-reliance, he fell. 'Though all should desert thee, I never will forsake thee,' were his words to his Lord; and one little hour later he swore that he knew not the man. And look at the countless host of apostates of all ages and climes,—men drinking in, as from a full fountain, the knowledge and beauty, and truth of Catholicity,—deserting their God, forgetting all his tears and his sufferings, laughing to scorn the undying love that keeps Him still upon earth while reigning in heaven;

trampling upon the very blood that crimsoned Calvary's summit, when they loosen their hold upon the hand that can never lead astray,—turn from the heart that can never deceive, to lean upon their own weak will and paltry strength. Oh, we may well distrust ourselves, when we know these things; we may well wonder at the Goodness which, almost in spite of us, so sustains us that we do not fall with them."

She had risen up in her excitement, and stood now with the full light streaming on her, and the rich materials of her work scattered at her feet. Pale, quiet Alice Dalton sat with clasped hands gazing at Margaret, as if she was some bright vision of another world, and Etienne silently gathered up her silks, and placed them in her hand

"Well," said Frederick, "that's a pretty long speech, and a pretty sober one, too, for

you, Madge. What do you think of her for a poetess, Hortense?"

For a moment Margaret was embarrassed by her own warmth, and said, with a smile, "I did not intend to say so much, but you know it is all true. My stole is finished, and I will say good night. I wish you all a very, very happy New Year. Come, Alice, let us go upstairs." Etienne opened the door for them, and as Margaret passed out, held her offered hand for a moment in both of his. Some words seemed trembling on his lips, but he released her without speaking them.

An hour later, while Margaret was pacing to and fro, saying her rosary, Mrs. Hamilton sent for her.

Hortense was sitting at her toilette, brushing her long, black hair,—a half hour's labor,—but it was finished at last; the delicate lace fell gracefully over the knot be-

hind, and loops of pale, blue ribbon, confined the bandeaux in front.

"Well, Hortense," said Margaret, "I have been patience personified, waiting to know what I was sent for, I can't see the use of such elaborate night toilettes as you make. I would be dreadfully tired if I took all that trouble with my hair. See how quickly I manage it." She loosened the long, bright coils, and gathering them all together, fastened them back with her comb.

"Such careless arrangements may do for people of your style, but they would be unbecoming to me."

Her tone reminded Margaret unpleasantly of a speech she had heard her make when she was a child. Hortense, then in her first, or second season, and very much admired, was taken ill; and her first request was, that if she died, and did not look well

in her coffin, that it might be closed. 'O vanity of vanities."

"Margaret," said Hortense, "I have sent for you to give you an opportunity of making me your confidant. You will have to do so in the end, and why not now?"

"Confidant of what?" exclaimed Margaret, with a look of surprise. "I have no secrets to tell."

"Have you not consented to be Madame Etienne Lamar?" She laughed merrily. "No; I have not even thought of it. It will be time enough when I am asked."

Hortense wheeled suddenly around, and fixed her keen eyes upon Margaret's face; but it was perfectly guileless in its expression, although the color was mounting to the very brow. "Then Etienne has not proposed! Marguerite, if you had half wit, you would see that he is going to do it."

She was silent a moment, and then answered gravely: "I am very sorry if he

has any such intentions. Hortense, do not let him do it. You must prevent him."

"Indeed, I will do no such thing! Marguerite, you really do not intend to refuse him?"

"I must, Hortense; I cannot do otherwise."

"And why not, pray?" she asked, in no amiable tone. "Setting aside his wealth and high position, he is handsome and intellectual enough to captivate a romantic fancy, such as you have. Even if you don't care for him, you should not let such a good offer escape." She shook her head. "It is not that; but I could not accept him, even if I suffered myself to fall in love with him, as you call it."

"Marguerite, you are certainly the most incomprehensible girl I ever knew. What possible necessity can there be for keeping that rebellious organ in subjection, if it is disposed to place itself in Etienne's charge."

"Because," Margaret said slowly, and without heeding her disagreeable manner, "he is not of my faith; and I cannot disobey the church. I cannot place my own soul in jeopardy."

Hortense knew that it would be impossible to move her while she maintained *that* position. Impulsive, and yielding to affection in other things, there was in matters touching her religion too high a principle guiding her to be easily moved. But she was unwilling, now that the subject was broached, to leave it until she was sure Margaret would do as she wished.

"Marguerite," she said presently, with great apparent sincerity, "you know it is no interest of mine whether you *ever* marry or not; it is only for your own sake that I wish this match. You will not easily make so fine a one; and, besides, you have encouraged Etienne to such a degree that he has almost a right to demand you."

"Encouraged!" she repeated, in unbounded astonishment. "Never, intentionally. Indeed, Hortense, I could not do that."

"I declare your simplicity is unbearable," exclaimed Mrs. Hamilton, throwing off her assumed manner. "What else can it be called but encouragement? You have talked to him when no one else could draw more than monosyllables from you. You have received his attentions in the most public manner, and with pleasure too, or your sparkling looks belied you. What on earth has religion to do in the matter?"

"It is just because it will have so little that I most object. O Hortense! do not speak of it. I am really sorry that I have unconsciously given Mr. Lamar any cause to think of me as his wife, and I shall take care not to do so again. He will forget this fancy soon."

She would listen to nothing more, but

went to her room, a little saddened by the part she had been so unwittingly playing. That passed soon in thoughts of the coming morning's happiness.

IV.

A PROFLIGATE'S PROMISE.

THE winter was passing slowly away, and Etienne still lingered in Cincinnati. Margaret regretted very much that Mrs. Hamilton had spoken to her of his fancy—she could not help thinking it but that—for herself. She never met him now that she did not think of it; and the fear of giving encouragement made her very reserved, and quite changed her happy, graceful bearing toward him. There was no more harmless jesting between them; and the long, pleasant morning readings, which had been such sources of enjoyment and mental improve-

ment, were quite neglected. Yes, she was very sorry; the more so, because she could see so little reason for the change, so little cause for the constant watchfulness she almost felt bound to keep upon her words and actions. Etienne still spent his mornings in the library reading, and his evenings with her, but apparently without noticing her increasing reserve. Only once, when she entered the library, singing softly to herself, as she was in the habit of doing, and retreated with a deep blush when she saw him seated at the table, he said, half in jest, half in earnest, "Have I been doing any thing of late to frighten you? I do not like my little friend to shun me in this way."

Margaret was sure that something of deeper import than Hortense believed was engrossing his thoughts, and yet she could not be the gay, unsuspicious Margaret of a month before. She was beginning to see

the miserable cheatery of the world that had at first looked so fair and beautiful; beginning to get glimpses of the dark depths in human hearts that were never lit by generous feelings, or lofty impulses; growing a little less credulous in worldly matters, and fixing her heart more firmly than ever upon purer and holier things. It was well for her that she did this; well that she found shelter for her frail boat, while the deep calm was on life's sea, so that the tempest which rose did not sweep it out, to be swallowed in the angry waves.

Long before the huntsman was stirring, she was in the dim, morning light making her way to mass; and almost every day she stole out, when Hortense was sleeping after dinner, and her father had gone to his business, to visit the Blessed Sacrament. No place possessed the attraction of the little old cathedral, with its low galleries, and pointed windows. And there was some-

thing very homelike in the dark, narrow passages, and small rooms of the bishop's house. In the afternoons, when the front gates were locked, she went in through the yard, and under the little Gothic porch, passed the winding stairway, and through the sacristy, into the body of the church, stopping sometimes at the bishop's door to speak to him, and hear his fervent "God bless you, my child." It was worth a great deal to hear but that, for the tone in which it was spoken was always so earnest, she was sure it brought down the blessing it invoked. "Ah! if I ever need a true earthly friend I should know where to come," was always Margaret's thought after seeing him.

One evening she knelt in the church longer than usual; it almost seemed to her that some sorrow was coming upon her, and she was enjoying happiness while she could. Those who came and went glanced at the motionless girl, whose uplifted face

was tender and beautiful enough for a sculptor's model of devotion, and wondered who she was, for she had few Catholic friends. It was nearly dark when she came into the street, and hurried homeward, her heart again full of the intense happiness which had of late been a little disturbed. Like a child gazing in sorrowful astonishment at the glittering bubble bursting in its hand, she had wondered that the fair outward seeming of social life should be so hollow as she was daily discovering it to be; but this night her only wonder was that she had ever put faith in it. And she quietly resolved to think no more of it, but go on her way, doing what good she could, —lightening, as far as possible, the care that seemed weighing her father down, making amends by her own trust and affection for Hortense's utter want of both; striving to save Frederick by the gentlest persuasion, and most earnest prayer; and

then suffering Etienne to think and do as he would, only hoping, for his own sake, that he might one day be a Catholic.

He came in just as she reached home, and stood in the hall, taking off her wrappings. "Where have you been so long?" he asked. "I thought you were lost."

"No danger of that," she answered, with one of her bright smiles. "Is papa at home? Yes, I see his shadow on the wall. Hortense is going to Mrs. Stanley's, and I mean to have a nice time with papa."

"I thought you would go too. I have just brought a lovely bouquet for you. Mrs. Hamilton ordered it," he added, as he took her in to show it to her, and perceived that she was hesitating about accepting it.

"It is very beautiful," she said, bending down to inhale the fragrance of tube-rose and jessamine. "I shall enjoy it more at home than in a crowded room. Hortense knows I cannot go; it is Lent."

"Let me stay with you then," he said, with no displeased expression in his fine eyes; "I will read aloud."

She did not answer until she had kissed her father, and seated herself beside him. "You promised to go, Mr. Lamar, did you not?"

"Yes," he said, carelessly; "but that makes no difference. I can say with truth that I changed my mind. Why are you looking so serious?"

The fire light was shining on her face, and he was struck with its gravity. "I am only thinking how much better it would be never to break a promise," she said, with her childish sincerity.

He looked a little disconcerted, but rose immediately. "Well, I will dress, and go early. You will not insist upon my staying all night, as is the fashion now, will you?"

"Oh no," she laughed; "come back as soon as you please."

Neither he nor Hortense made their appearance at the tea-table, so Mr. Hamilton and Margaret had it alone. She made tea, and helped her father, laughing and chatting gayly; but he was abstracted; and when they had finished, and were again seated in the parlor, and she had begun to read aloud, he sighed so heavily, that she closed her book, asking, "Papa, what is the matter? Do not you like Coleridge to-night?" It was the Wallenstein she was reading.

"No, darling," he said, wearily; "I do not think there is any thing that will please me half so well as looking into your face. What makes it so bright? Not color, for you have none now,

'O rare pale Margaret,
O fair pale Margaret.'"

She folded her hands together, as she always did when thinking, and was silent for

a moment. "Papa, I wish you were a Catholic!" she said, suddenly. He could not repress a smile at her earnestness, but sighed afterwards.

"I am afraid, dear, that would not lighten my face, nor my heart either."

"Oh yes, it would, papa! Tell me what darkens both. I can see one *is* doubt," she added, half playfully, caressing his cheek. "Tell me, papa."

"No, Margaret. I would not implant a single feeling of distrust in your confiding, unsuspicious heart; I would not sadden you by telling how vain and selfish those we most love are. But I will ask you, my child, to be still my hope, my comfort, my all, in whatever evil betide me."

The tears were in her eyes, and she dared not trust her voice to speak.

He went on: "And Frederick, besides disgracing us all, is ruining me. I cannot bear it long; I shall go down with a crash."

He spoke with startling energy. "It will be a terrible blow for Hortense. O Hortense! Hortense!" he repeated so bitterly, that Margaret saw he felt his wife's utter heartlessness more than any thing else. "She might have saved me all this sorrow, and now that it is coming fast upon me, she leaves me alone to meet it. She can lavish thousands upon dress and vanities, and spend night after night at fashionable revels, without a thought for my happiness. Margaret, I believe now she never cared for me; she only married my purse. Well! she can have that as long as it lasts; it will soon be empty."

"O papa! do not talk so. You are only low-spirited to-night. Your fears will all be gone by to-morrow."

"No," he said, despondingly; "I am fearfully embarrassed. I see no hope of meeting my responsibilities." "Is that Hortense?" he asked again in that bitterly re-

proachful voice, as she passed through the hall, to enter the carriage. Mr. Lamar put his head in the door to say good night, and then followed her. They were alone again; the parent and child each wrapped in their own thoughts. Mr. Hamilton, stung by his wife's selfish worldliness, resolving to leave her in ignorance until the sudden loss of wealth would either crush, or change her; and Margaret sadly going back to the past, and wishing, Oh so heartily! that it was in her power to make Hortense what her own dear mother had been. It seemed a hopeless task. And Frederick, too! he had deceived her. He was none the better for her entreaties and prayers.

"Good night," said her father, after a long silence. "God bless you, dear. Do not let these sad things rest upon your mind. I am sorry I spoke of them, but it seems to me you have a way of dispelling

all shadows from your spirit. Some day you must teach me how."

"Shall I, papa?" she exclaimed, clasping her hands in eager delight. "Oh, if I may do that, no sorrow or suffering will be worth talking of. Let me begin now; let me tell you how faith lights up the darkest cavern of human woe; with what firm steps she leads us over the roughest paths of life, pointing ever to the Divine Master, who walks before us with the cross upon his shoulders, and the thorny crown on his brow; how she bids us look into the August heart, laid bare to our view, and see how its every throb, from the first in Bethlehem to the last on Calvary, was agonizing in its intense love, its unflinching constancy, and then ask ourselves if the momentary pangs we feel are written or thought. O papa! papa! I can't talk to you." Her arms were around his neck, and her cheek wet with tears pressed close to his. "Do not you

know, papa," she whispered presently very softly, "that Catholic Faith, and Hope and Charity,—not the cold affairs Protestants give those names, but the living, burning virtues imparted by the Holy Ghost,—alone can make life light, and purchase an unutterably bright eternity?"

He did not answer, but in a little while unwound her arms, and kissing her forehead, repeated, "God bless you, dear! God bless you!" and went away.

Margaret's tears flowed for a while, but they were not sad ones. When she lifted up her head, Frederick, pale and haggard, stood before her. "Margaret," he said, hurriedly, "have you any money? I must have it; and I dare ask no one but you Give me what you have. Forget and forgive this once, and I will do all you wish."

"You have been gambling, Frederick," she said, rather than asked, with a shudder. He was silent, and shrank from her sorrow-

ful gaze; there was something in it he could not meet. Tears and reproaches would have been far preferable to the white, painful tranquillity of every feature; but she had no heart for either. Slowly, as if worn out with fatigue, she went to the door, motioning him to remain. He walked the room with quick, nervous strides, until she returned, and placed a small roll of bills in his hand. It was her little treasure, —dollars saved from the sums Hortense, with unsparing hand, gave her for her private use, and hoarded for some charitable purpose; and without a word of thanks her brother grasped them, and left her. She went to the window, and with a weary, helpless look, gazed out on the cold, cloudless sky. How calmly the stars were shining, and how solemn the earth, with its shadows, looked in their dim light! Her heart grew strong again, and with a calmness that astonished herself, she examined

her chances of success in the task she had so enthusiastically undertaken—her brother's reformation. She was beginning to see its difficulty; the strong ties of habit that would have to be cut through, the frequent relapses, promises heedlessly made, and as heedlessly broken, to be patiently borne, and the calm, yet fervent zeal, necessary to surmount all these. But it was not impossible; with grace and perseverance it might be accomplished. And how fervently she prayed in the solemn starlight for that grace, none but He who alone saw her could know. But another thought soon disturbed her. She knew that when Frederick began to lose at the gambling-table, he played like a madman, and surely the trifling sum she had given him was not enough to cover his losses. "He will use it to try and win back what he has lost, and I have only given him the means of sinning more." It was like a dash of cold water upon her high resolves

of the moment before. So she stood with bright, tearless eyes, and her forehead furrowed by the intentness of her gaze, until Mr. Lamar came in. She had not seen him enter, and it was only when he spoke that she became aware of his presence.

"Pardon me, Miss Hamilton, you will take cold here. I had no idea I was away so long." The fire had smouldered away, and the lamp was burning dim. "Let me leave you at your room, as I go to my own." Margaret was too pre-occupied to notice the exceeding gentleness of his manner; he thought she had waited for him.

"Where is Hortense?" she asked, as they went up the stairway together.

"Enjoying herself. She will not be home these two hours. Good night."

Margaret went to bed, and dreamed that her brother was sleeping in a frail boat, that was sweeping down the rapids of Niagara River. She stood on the top of the

tower that is on the very brink of the great fall, and saw him coming on with fearful speed, without power to help, or even warn him. She tried in vain to wake him by her cries—the roar of the water drowned her voice ; and dashing from rock to rock, he drew nearer and nearer the fatal leap. At last he stood up,—he saw his danger, and then, tossing up his arms, with a wild, hopeless cry, went down into the boiling surge.

V.

SOMETHING LIKE OLD TIMES.

"MARGARET, are you busy? May I come in?" asked Frederick, the next day, looking into his sister's room. She was bending over a picture which lay on her work-table, and without waiting for an answer he closed the door and looked over her shoulder. It was their mother's portrait she was gazing at. "There is the money you lent me last night, Margaret," he said, tossing out some gold, and turning to leave, but she grasped his hand.

"What I feared is true, then! O Fred! brother! why have you done this?"

"What, Margaret? returned your money? I will keep it if you wish," he added with an attempt at pleasantry.

She forced herself to smile and answer in the same tone. "No, I thank you, Fred. I have been unpacking some music, and I want to have a concert to-night, one of our old time concerts," glancing at the picture. "You must stay home and hear me sing. Come, brother, remember you are under obligations to me, and must do as I ask." He had not expected such a reception, and was unprepared for her playful manner; she had resolved to try what affection alone would do.

"Alice will expect me," he said evasively.

She had not the slightest suspicion of the compact Hortense and Frederick had made, and it was with a joyful surprise that she thought now for the first time that Alice might be an ally in her good work.

"I will send for Alice," she said, with a

bright smile, "if that will be an inducement!"

"But, Margaret, I promised to go to the Newport barracks to supper. I will come back early."

"No! I will not take a refusal. They can do without you for once. Dear Fred, let us give papa this pleasure, he has so little now. It is mamma's birth-day, and you know what a festival it used to be in our dear old home. I wish we were there again," she sighed. "I went all through the house yesterday, and the dark empty rooms looked so desolate. I thought the voice of the past reproached me when I was coming out, but it was only the sound of my footsteps on the uncarpeted floor, and the wind rushing through the long halls."

There was no resisting the tearful tenderness of her appeal, he was conquered, and promised to spend the evening at home, and for once kept his word. Hortense as usual

went to her dressing room after tea, and Margaret, voting the parlor "a barn of a place," led the way to a cozy little room at the back of the house, in which a piano and some old pictures belonging to the first Mrs. Hamilton were kept. She had ordered a fire, but would have no lamp ; and as she sat at the instrument, now shrouded in the dim twilight, now suddenly coming into full view as the flickering blaze shot up and lit the room with a momentary glory, Etienne, who was with them, thought her the very impersonation of a fireside genius, while Alice, who had come, sat silently watching the lights and shadows dancing through the room. Margaret seldom sang, except when alone or with her father ; she was too timid to sing for others, and Hortense cared little to hear her, as her voice was not a fashionably trained one. But this night there was a power and pathos in it that astonished her hearers. The instrument was an old

German one, almost organ-like in its depth and fulness of tone ; and Margaret's fingers, generally so trembling and uncertain, swept over the keys with a masterly skill. It was not for mere gratification she played ; a deeper motive gave strength to hand and voice. Song after song that had never been heard there before rang out that night ; old touching ballads her mother had taught her in the deserted homestead ; wild lays of the sea, that seemed to echo the sound of dashing waters, and which Fred had once loved ; until Mr. Hamilton, who lay back in his arm-chair, felt the old home feeling stealing over him again, and a look of repose settled upon his care-worn features. "Ah, if Hortense would but take the vacant place," he sighed to himself, "if she would but come here now."

He unclosed his eyes and saw her standing on the threshold, in all her cold haughty beauty, with glowing pomegranate blossoms

in her black hair, and a scarlet shawl folded around her, and with a pang he remembered a far less beautiful but more loveable face, and thought, "It can never be. She is made for admiration and display."

"Margaret, why are you playing here? Come to the parlor, visitors are there."

"Indeed, I cannot, Hortense. We are having a select party of our own, and you can't expect me to desert a very appreciating audience, for one that would not care two coppers for my music."

"Don't be nonsensical, Marguerite; Etienne, bring her with you." He shook his head. "I do not believe I will obey, Mrs. Hamilton. I am sure her voice would take wings to itself, and it is too beautiful to be sent off in that style."

"She has managed to keep it in the clouds pretty well until this evening," said Hortense; while Margaret, yielding to one of the old impulses that had of late been so sedu-

lously kept down, sprang from her stool with a gay laugh, and making a profound courtesy exclaimed, "You are absolutely delightful, Mr. Lamar. After that, Hortense, I am sure you will not ask me to go. We'll let you stay with us if you behave nicely."

Mr. Hamilton sprang forward: "Yes, Hortense, stay with us!"

"Thank you" she answered coldly, withdrawing a little. "My friends are waiting, I shall play for them to-night." Mr. Hamilton sank back with a look of disappointment, and Fred, who had been turning over the leaves of his sister's music book, laughed maliciously, and whispered in Margaret's ear, "Sis, that beauty of a mamma is bent on making a rich match for you, and as she is afraid Etienne is not catchable, she has put another string to her bow."

Hortense entertained her visitors with music as brilliant and devoid of feeling as herself, but even in the pauses of the glitter-

ing soulless measures, snatches of sweet plaintive song, and bursts of musical laughter stole up the hall.

"Papa is asleep!" said Margaret, closing her piano, "and it is eleven o'clock. I move an adjourned meeting until to-morrow evening at seven. Who seconds the motion?"

"I," said Mr. Lamar, "but for the last time. I must return to the south the next day."

A month before Margaret would have expressed her regret without a shadow of hesitation, for she really enjoyed his society, but now she merely said, "Must you? I suppose you will come back to Cincinnati some day."

"I do not know. It is doubtful, unless, indeed," he added, laughing, but with an earnest look, "unless you bid me. I would consider myself bound to obey your wishes."

"O no!" she said, slightly confused, "I would not like to interfere with any of your

arrangements." His dark face paled, and with a very grave good night he went.

"Why, Madge, I really shall be tempted to stay home every evening, if you can make them all as pleasant as this has been," said Frederick, with a laugh that sounded more like that which used to accompany Margaret's childish one, than any she had heard since her return. "Come, Alice, I will take you home."

"No," said Margaret, "she shall not go. Ally, dear, I want you to-night to stay with me." They went up the narrow back stairway together, and Margaret, with an instinctive dread that her brother would make his escape if possible, folded a shawl around herself and Alice, and the two walked up and down the hall that led to his room. The moonlight streamed in a window looking out on the garden, and as they crossed the broad beam of light, Fred's door opened. He stood still as he saw

them. "Do you want any thing, brother?" she asked.

"No. What are you walking in the cold for? Go to bed." His door was closed and locked, and Margaret breathed more freely.

"Margaret," said Alice, as they stopped to gaze out on the cold, clear, moonlit sky, "will you tell me something, if I ask it—something that very much concerns my happiness? I have heard," she continued, without waiting for the assurance she asked, "I have heard lately that Frederick goes night after night to a gambling house on the wharf, and plays recklessly. Is it true? Tell me."

She was trembling, and spoke so rapidly that Margaret had scarce time to answer with a half smothered sigh, and a vehement wish that she could contradict it.

"O I feared it!" said Alice, in a low frightened voice. "He comes to see me often, but in spite of his protestations I see

that he is anxious to be away, and then he often hurries off before the evening is half spent. Margaret, what shall I do? It will kill me if he does that after our marriage."

"Marriage!" repeated Margaret in astonishment, and then seizing her hand, added, "I am so glad! That will save him, Alice. I have wished to speak to you of this sad thing, and beg you to help me in my firm endeavors to loosen the hold that terrible vice has upon him. I know nothing of your engagement; but I suspected, Ally, that you had acquired an influence over him, and now we must use it together." Simple-hearted Margaret! She believed that Alice, with her pale, touching beauty, and gentle manners, had insensibly softened Fred's heart, and in the warmth of her own loving nature, she folded her in a sisterly embrace. "Dear Ally, we will labor together; we will so guard his steps with our love that he cannot escape us; and in the happy home we

will make him, he will soon forget all the wild excitement that seems so necessary for him now." Again the exalted look she had worn on New-Year's eve came into her face, so that Alice saw its glow in the still moonlight that noted them. *She* could not feel it, she was but a weak, loving girl, willing to do every thing for Fred's sake; but with Margaret's sisterly affection was mingled a lofty charity, an extreme desire of saving a soul.

"Did not Fred tell you of it?" asked Alice, after a pause.

"No, but I suppose he intended to. I cannot tell you what pleasure it gives me, Alice. There is but one thing that could give me more."

"And what is that?"

"Your being a good papist, with a prospect of making him one before you marry him," she said, half laughing. "I suppose I shall have to do double work to make you

both that. When is the wedding to take place?"

"Early in April. The first or second, I think."

"O no!" said Margaret. "Wait a little longer, that will be in Holy Week. Wait until after Easter, Ally, won't you?"

"Yes, certainly, if you wish it. I don't think after all it could be, for Hortense insisted upon Mr. Lamar being groomsman, and I am sure he will not return so soon."

"He is coming back, then?" asked Margaret, with a shade of disappointment in her face. She saw that Hortense was bent upon making her accept him. But she resolved that, with God's help, no power on earth should make her abandon her principles.

"Ally, would you not like to keep house in the old homestead? You know papa gave it to me long ago. It has been untenanted for nearly a year, and I do not

like to see it looking so dreary and desolate. I want the quaint rooms to be occupied as of old, and the garden, so sadly neglected, to be refixed. I cannot think how papa came to leave it. I am sure it is fifty times lovelier than this grand house, and the stiff, pragmatic squares out there which they dignify with the name of garden. Coax Fred to go there. I will take the rent out in board," she added, laughing gayly, "for I mean to spend a great deal of my time with you. And we will not forget our task, Ally, we will labor hard, and seek to make Fred a nobler, better man."

With a gush of tears Alice laid her head on Margaret's shoulder. "What can I do? You are an angel, Margaret, and if you cannot save him, none on earth can."

"Are you girls going to sit there in the cold chattering all night?" asked Mrs. Hamilton, crossing the hall from her dressing-room to her chamber, with her night-lamp in her hand.

"No, Mrs. Hamilton," said Margaret playfully. "We have finished our secret conference, and mean to retire now." She tried to shield Alice from the glare of the lamp, but Hortense threw the light upon their faces, and saw the tear stains on one, and the changing color on the other, and knew that they were caused by some deep emotion.

VI.

A PRESENT REFUSED.

EASTER came, bringing its joy and exultation to Margaret, and soon after came Etienne Lamar. In his manner to Margaret there was so much grave politeness, such distant, unmasked deference, that she was completely thrown off her guard ; and much to Hortense's satisfaction, the old familiar intercourse between them was gradually resumed, as the preparations for the bride's reception progressed. The old laughter and jesting went on, the morning readings too when it was possible, though that was not often, for Margaret was in great demand at all consul-

tations on dress and other arrangements. And after the wedding, when Frederick and his wife came to spend a month with them, and the round of fêtes in their honor began, Etienne was Margaret's constant attendant, as he had been in the early winter. And so the weeks passed by, Margaret putting aside the light shadows that had begun to darken her path, and again enjoying to the fullest extent the happiness that sprang from a heart full of peace; and Etienne building anew the fair Chateau en Espagne which had once been levelled.

They returned from a drive one day, and Margaret sprang from the carriage and up the steps with her arms full of lilacs, which she had gathered at the old homestead in passing. She went into the parlor, and found Alice crouching rather than sitting in the low back window, her face buried in her hands, and her slight form shaking like a reed in a storm. In a moment the flowers

were dropped heedlessly over the carpet, and Margaret's arms were around her.

"Ally! dear Ally! what is the matter? Has Fred been gambling again?" she asked hurriedly.

"O no! I believe not. I hope not," she answered, in such a helpless tone that Margaret could scarce control her own voice. "Tell me what it is then, Alice?"

"I cannot. It is to come. O Hortense! Hortense!" With a start she remembered how her father had not very long before pronounced that name in just such a reproachful tone. Why was it so? What evil spell was Hortense weaving over every inmate of the house? "There is Fred!" exclaimed Alice, as she heard her husband's step in the hall. "Give him this, Margaret, and tell him it is all I have, that I care no longer for it, but it will not compensate him for a richer gift which he regrets." She threw up the sash, and was gone before he

entered the room. Margaret was bewilderd but did as Alice had desired.

Her brother grasped the packet she handed him, and scarce heeding the message she delivered, broke the seal. It contained the deeds of some property, and several thousand dollars, all the wealth Alice possessed. "Bah! Is that all? See here, Hortense," he continued, as Mrs. Hamilton, in a sumptuous dinner dress, entered the room; "is this the magnificent fortune I was promised? It doesn't pay for the trouble I gave myself to win it."

She glanced over the papers. "Why it *is* a great deal less than I thought. But I am sure, Fred, it is capital enough to begin with, and if you make good use of it, will soon be trebled."

He laughed. "I intend to make good use of it this very night. If I am not worth twice as much to-morrow morning, it will not be my fault."

Margaret understood *that*, and sprang forward a step, but suddenly stood still again. She knew remonstrance would be useless. "Well, Fred," said Mrs. Hamilton, "I hope you will do something for yourself now. It is high time, I think. Hand me that casket, Margaret. Just see what Mr. Hamilton has refused to give me, because his son has drawn so extensively upon his funds during the past year." She touched the spring, and as the lid flew open, Margaret uttered an exclamation over the brilliant jewels that lay flashing within. "Are they not superb?" asked Mrs. Hamilton.

"Yes; and you look regal in them," said Frederick, clasping them on her. Etienne came in while she stood there, with the circle of gems burning like stars in her midnight hair, and glistening on her neck and arms.

"They are very beautiful," he said, as

Hortense extended her arm, that he might examine its brilliant ornament. "I have seldom seen finer; and they are well set, too. Miss Hamilton, you should have a match for them."

"I?" exclaimed Margaret. "No; I do not care for diamonds. The only jewels I ever fancied were pearls; and yet I think if I wore them I should be haunted by the ghost of the weary, dim-eyed diver, who had gone down into ocean's caves to gather them; and ever in my ears would ring that sorrowful strain,

'A life hath been like a rain-drop shed,
For that pale quivering ray.'"

"Oh do not fancy any thing about it," said Hortense sarcastically; "you will not have a chance of being haunted, my dear, unless you get a rich lover, or husband, to present you with pearls. Your father refused you quite as much as he did me.

How do you like these, Mr. Lamar?" She lifted up a portion of the casket, and beneath lay a complete set of pearls. "I thought I knew your taste, Marguerite. But do not be tempted; you cannot have them."

She laughed. "I care very little for them, I assure you. Flowers are quite costly enough for me." She gathered up her scattered lilacs, and began to arrange them in a vase; and Fred, taking his package of papers and bills, went out. Hortense, slowly and reluctantly, unfastened the gems she wore; while Mr. Lamar silently examined the pearls, thinking how much Margaret's taste was in keeping with her character. "Let me put them up," said Hortense presently, taking them from his hand; "I promised Palmer an answer at one o'clock, and it is two now; they must be returned."

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"I am going that way now; let me leave them for you," he said.

"It is too near dinner-time; wait until afterwards."

"No; I shall be back in time."

Margaret went up to Ally's room to discover, if possible, the cause of her strange excitement; but did not succeed. All Alice would tell her was, that she feared Fred would soon resume his old habits.

"Ally, dear, why did you give him money? It will be a temptation to him, and I do not think he can resist. It would have been kinder to keep your little fortune, for he will have nothing of his own that he will not stake at the gambling-table."

"Oh, I could not help it, Margaret," she said, with a burst of tears, and wringing her hands in hopeless anguish. "I am so miserable; I shall never be happy again."

It was long before she would be soothed by the gentlest caresses, the most affectionate

words. The two went down to dinner, both looking a little pale and anxious ; and Margaret again with the unsatisfied feeling that had once before visited her. It happened to be Ally's birthday ; she was just of age, and had that morning received her property from her guardian's hands. And there was to be a party in the evening at a friend's house. Margaret went early to her room to dress, and found the pearls on her toilette, with a card, on which was written, in Etienne's hand, "Margaret, will you not wear them for my sake?" In a moment she understood her position,—saw that her own simplicity had again duped her ; that she was leading him on to that which she most wished to avoid. And without glancing at them a second time, hastily wrote in pencil beneath his words, "I cannot ;" and ringing for a servant, sent casket and card to Mr. Lamar's room. It was well she did it so speedily, for Hortense came in a moment

after; and although she said nothing, her keen eyes went roving in search of the present she suspected Margaret had received. Etienne was standing in the parlor when she went down, wearing a few fragrant flowers in her beautiful hair, instead of the gems he had wished to see there. How pale and sad he looked, with his arms folded, and his head bent down! She was really grieved, and softly stepped back, anxious to save him the pain of a direct refusal. But he saw her, and refused to accept of her kindness.

"Come in, Margaret; I want to speak to you. I must be certain that I have understood you aright."

She saw that it was best to be frank with him now. "I think so." And after a moment's pause, she went on quickly, the flush mounting to her very forehead, and her eyelids drooping: "I am very, very sorry, Mr. Lamar, that any thing has occurred to

interrupt our friendly relations. Believe me, whatever encouragement I have given has been unconscious. Being a Catholic, I could not think of marrying a Protestant; and I believe myself incapable of inspiring a deeper feeling than that of friendship." It cost her a very great effort to say this much, but she thought it best to finish the matter, once for all.

"You have, indeed, given me cause to hope," he said, gravely; but a moment after, asked with all the impetuosity of his nature, "Margaret, why need your faith divide us? You do not think me base enough to interfere with any thing you considered a religious duty?"

"No; but I dare not trust myself. I would but court temptation, and by the very act render myself unworthy of the grace necessary to sustain me, should my faith be tried. Forgive me, if I must wound you; it is painful indeed."

There was no need of saying more; with one bitter exclamation, he was gone.

"Where is Alice?" asked Frederick, coming in a moment later, while Margaret was still standing in sorrowful thought, when Mr. Lamar had left her. "Tell her, I will not be able to go out with her to-night; she must go with you and Lamar."

"I do not think he will do me that honor. We will have no escort if you play us false,—not even Hortense as a chaperone, for she is going to the concert," she said, with forced gayety. "I can't allow you to desert us. Ally, come here, and give your truant Knight his orders."

Alice, with a face almost as white as her snowy gauze dress, came into the room. "I am ready; are you waiting for me?"

"No," said her husband, hurriedly; "I came to tell you I could not go. Some friends are waiting for me. Good-bye."

There was strange strength in the deli-

cate hands that grasped his arm ; strange vehemence in the usually gentle voice,—"Brother, do not go ! By all that is dear to you, I conjure you to renounce for ever these fatal associates. Think of Alice, brother ; for her sake—"

"Oh no ! no !" she exclaimed, with passionate vehemence. "Not for mine. Do not ask him that, Margaret ; it will but send him the quicker."

He broke from his sister's grasp, muttering a curse upon the foolishness of women ; and they saw him no more that night. Many comments were made upon the young bride's pale, joyless look, and Margaret's evident depression ; but, happily, they knew nothing of it. Margaret in vain tried to conceal her own anxiety, that she might shield her sister's from observation ; and, perhaps, for once regretted that she did not possess Hortense's tact. Etienne came to her while she sat tired out with the fruitless

effort. "Pardon me, Miss Hamilton, for intruding upon you. Mrs. Hamilton looks so weary and ill, that I have come to offer myself as an escort home."

"You are very kind," she said, with a grateful look. "Where is Alice?"

"Putting on her shawl; she is anxious to go."

"Then we will go at once. Is Alice ill? The carriage has gone for Hortense."

"I have provided one," he said. After that evening he carefully avoided meeting her except in the presence of others, and then never paid her the slightest attention that could be construed into any thing more than the merest politeness. It quite changed the aspect of the family; they had been the life of the house, and now that they were cold and distant, the rest seemed to be chilled into silence and gravity. All but Hortense. She tried reproaches and entreaties alike in vain; or, to use her own

expression, moved heaven and earth to make Margaret sensible: she would neither be driven, nor persuaded, into a marriage her conscience did not approve of. But Hortense succeeded in making her feel very miserable about the affair, and reproach herself greatly for her apparent coquetry.

She was thinking of it one evening as she sat at the open window sewing, while the soft, fragrant air of May, played over her. Her father had been watching her busy fingers for a long time.

"And so my little Margaret," he said, at last, "you have refused to go South with Mr. Lamar. Don't you think you would like it?"

"The South?" she said, evasively; "yes, I am sure I should like to go there some day with you."

"But not with Etienne?"

"You do not want me to leave you already, papa, do you? I would a great deal

rather be with you than with any one else in the world."

"I know it, my darling," he said, softly stroking her hair. "I know, too, I would miss you sadly; but I am not so selfish as to wish to keep you always. Tell me the truth, Margaret; why have you refused him?"

She told him with a quiet, determined look, her insurmountable obstacle. "I do not think you need fear on that score; he is too high-minded and honorable to interfere in the least with your opinions."

She did not answer, and for a moment suffered herself to reproach Hortense silently for troubling her father with this matter. She knew it was her work.

"Margaret," he continued, after a pause, "you know me too well to think I would compel you to do any thing that would not be for your own happiness. You know it is not selfishness that prompts me to ask what I now do;—marry Etienne for my

sake! Save me, my child, from utter ruin. None but you can do it, and you surely will not refuse. His wealth will be the means of redeeming me from disgrace, or, at least, his influence will obtain me time to recover my own."

He had taken her hands, and gazed into her face with anxious, troubled eyes. "Papa, I cannot!" she said. "I do not know what disgrace you mean, but nothing can tempt me to do that which would surely incur evil. If it is poverty that you dread for my sake, be sure, papa, I do not fear it. We will be but the more necessary to each other, if that comes upon us. Do not try to drive me away, dear papa; I want to be *your* Margaret always."

He did not speak again for a long time; but as the daylight wore away, and the new May moon looked down upon them, he said, as if awakened from a reverie, "Let it come; with your love, I cannot be poor."

VII.

SUDDEN RETRIBUTION.

Frederick fell again into his old mode of life; it had become too like nature to be easily changed, and the money he had received from his wife was, as Margaret feared, but a new temptation. Night after night he remained away until very late, and then generally returned with a gloomy, morose look. He was evidently not prospering in his evil career; Margaret saw it with less pain than pleasure, for she hoped when all he had was squandered, and there was no probability of obtaining more, except by his own labor, he would grow wiser. Alice

never spoke of him now ; never even to Margaret, whom she loved better than all the rest, told the cause of her constant sadness. She was always gentle, always did whatever her husband desired, but it was not with that graceful quickness of affection which had made her so beautiful in the first weeks of their marriage ; there was hesitation and a timidity that seemed fearful of offending in all her actions.

One evening she and Margaret were walking up and down the hall, and on the porch overlooking the garden, Margaret, with her light-hearted gayety, trying to make Alice merry for a while. She was showing her some flowers she had brought from the homestead that day.

"Are they not lovely? Only look at this superb rose. It is early yet for roses, but I found this growing in a sunny sheltered corner where an old window had fallen over it slantwise, and so it was enclosed in a

sort of hot-bed. There is one of the same species here, but it is a miserably stunted affair, and has only half a bud on it. It is the truth," she exclaimed, as Alice, with a smile shook her head ; "the other half is eaten off by worms, but Hortense thinks it is advancing to perfection. I heard her tell Mr. Stanley the other day, that it was one of the finest bushes in town."

She laughed until the tears came into her eyes.

"If you had lived as I have, Ally, with flowers and trees all my life, you would think the city affairs they call by those names but poor apologies. Now at the homestead it is something like. By the way, you have never told me what Frederick decided upon doing. Will you go to housekeeping then ? Do, Ally ! It is a most lovely place to live in, almost like the country."

"I am afraid I cannot," she said, the pained look Margaret had succeeded in ban-

ishing for a moment, returning to her face "I do not think we shall go to housekeeping at all. I do not know what is to become of us, Margaret ; I believe Fred has spent every thing, and has even sold the little property I gave him. Yesterday he asked me to sign a deed, saying he had sold the lot on Third street. And last night," she went on in a forced calmness, "he was away, and returned this morning, looking so gloomy and speaking so harshly, that I felt sure he had lost the money he had received for it."

"O that is too bad!" exclaimed Margaret, indignantly, "It is downright robbery. I shall speak to papa about it. Why did you sign the deed, Alice?"

"Because she is more obliging than you would have been, Madge," said her brother, joining them. "Do not be so alarmed about the safety of your fortune, Mrs. Hamilton," he said mockingly. "I shall place it in

your hands again to-morrow morning, since it seems you repent the gift you made of it to me."

She did not answer his taunt, but Margaret saw that her lips quivered, and felt her trembling, and when Frederick left them abruptly, she bowed her head and cried bitterly.

"Hush! hush! dear Alice. He did not mean to wound you so; Mr. Lamar is coming. Do not cry any more, Ally."

She hastily wiped away the traces of tears as Etienne came down the hall towards them, and left them for a few moments to stand in the outer hall door, and gaze down the street, in the vain hope of seeing her husband returning.

"Margaret," said Mr. Lamar, while they were alone, "will you forgive me if I once more introduce a disagreeable topic? Have you ever suspected that things are not going right with Frederick?"

"I have not suspected, I know it," she said, in a low but unfaltering voice of suppressed sorrow. "Is there nothing that you can do, Mr. Lamar, for him? You can follow and watch over him, where neither Ally nor I dare go; will you not try to help us save him?"

She had taken his hand in both of hers, and looked up now with a new gleam of hope in her face. "Yes, for your sake, Margaret, I will do what I can. I fear it will be useless."

"Not for my sake, but from a higher and purer motive," she said, with a burst of tears. It only lasted a moment. "I am so frightened, whenever I think of Fred, that I cannot control myself. O, I wish he would come home now!"

Alice came in, and Etienne dared not tell what he had that morning heard He was sitting in the library window reading, but so hidden by the heavy folds of the curtains,

that none within the room could see him. Hortense, unconscious of his presence, as he was of hers, sat at a desk writing. Frederick came in and stood beside her, while she folded and sealed a letter, and then said abruptly, "Well, madam! The last copper of the fine fortune you helped me to get is gone. What am I to do now?"

"I am sure I do not know," she said, in her quiet, tantalizing way, and fixing her eyes upon his haggard face, "try and make one of your own, I suppose."

"How in the name of sense am I to do that? Hortense, don't sit there staring at me, or I'll be tempted to dash my fist in your eyes."

She laughed. "Mr. Hamilton, you have forgotten all your gentlemanly manners. You must take lessons in politeness again."

He ground his teeth to keep down the rising passion. "If you were not a woman you should pay dearly for all this insolence.

Hortense, I will not bandy words with you; I must have money,—Iwill have it!" he added, stamping his foot, and giving the desk a blow with his clenched hand, that made it shake.

"Get it then as you best can," she said, quietly resuming her interrupted work, "but don't bother me with your passion; I have letters to write."

He laughed bitterly. "Well! well! I can do nothing but yield to you, Hortense. Tell me how to get money, and I will not disturb you. I *must* have it, or say good-bye to this world."

"Ah! that is better. But there is still room for improvement in your manner of making a request. Let me see! Etienne Lamar received a large amount yesterday; could you not borrow from him?"

"Borrow! And how should I repay it?" She did not answer, and he stood in silent thought a moment, and then, with an oath,

exclaimed, "I have it now! I will run the risk, and if I do not succeed, it will be the last game Fred Hamilton plays." He went out, and Hortense soon followed. Etienne would have escaped long before, but he could not move without attracting their attention, and looking like an eavesdropper.

It was of this he wanted to tell Margaret, had not Ally's entrance prevented him. Margaret had dried her tears, and was talking as before.

Etienne walked a while with them, and then, with something of his old openness of manner, asked Margaret to sing for him.

"Perhaps it is the last time I shall have that pleasure," he said softly, drawing her hand within his arm, and leading her to her own piano in the little back room. "You know I start for New York to-morrow, and from there I think I shall go to Europe."

They sat quite late, singing and talking,

and striving, as if by mutual consent, to cheer Alice. Some unusual noise in his room, which was just overhead, startled Etienne ; and saying he had left a large amount of money scattered on the table, he hurried up to see what was going on. A moment after they heard him call, and both Margaret and Alice, repeating his cry for help, ran up stairs. There was no lamp in the room, but they could see by the dim starlight creeping in the open window, that he was striving to hold some one down. He saw them darken the doorway, and called, "Margaret, will you get a light, and some one to help me secure this rascal. Don't be frightened. There is no damage done."

Mr. Hamilton, aroused by the cry, came in, lamp in hand, before she could obey, and as the light flashed upon Etienne and the masked man he was grasping, Margaret felt a strange choking sensation, and the thought flashed over her, "How very like

Fred," and Alice clenched her arm so tightly, that the print of her slender fingers was left on the delicate skin. Mr. Hamilton and Etienne bound the intruder's hands with the strap of a trunk, and then took off his mask. He had held a knife, and in the scuffle had gashed his own face, and it was a moment before they recognized the blood-stained and distorted visage. Alice first knew it, and uttered in a wild, piercing shriek, "Frederick!"

Margaret, with a sudden impulse, put up her hands to shut out the fearful sight. "Yes! yes! Frederick Hamilton, dashing about like a madman. What brings you here, madam? Come and take the cursed gold out of my pocket, or undo the knot your friend Lamar has tied so cleverly, and I'll do it myself." He ground his teeth and shook his head in impotent rage, as Etienne advanced to loosen his fetters, muttering something in his astonishment about, "a

trick to frighten us," and "quite a mistake."

"No," Fred exclaimed, with a fearful imprecation. "I wanted your money! I came for that! Wait until my hands are free, and I'll pay you for this gash in my face." With one powerful effort he burst the cords that bound his hands, and picking up the knife he had dropped, and which they in the confusion had forgotten, sprang towards Etienne. He grasped him again, and Frederick, finding his efforts to accomplish his purpose quite useless—for Mr. Lamar's hands had the strength of a vice—threw himself forward, and turning the point of his weapon, plunged it into his own breast. Margaret was at his side in a second, and his blood flowed over her arms, and stained her white hands. "O my God! what is this?" exclaimed Mr. Hamilton, scarce yet understanding the fearful scene, while Alice, who had seen it all at a glance, walked to and

fro, wringing her hands in hopeless anguish. Frederick answered his father with a frantic laugh, an oath hoarsely gurgling in his throat, and then fell back a ghastly corpse. Margaret neither shrieked nor wept, but for a moment stood white and rigid as marble, her hands clasped so tightly together, it seemed as if they would never part ; then with a low sigh sank insensible at his feet.

When consciousness returned she was in her own room. It all seemed like a dream, and but for the blood stains on her clothes, she would have thought it that. But, alas, it was too real. She rose up, gently putting aside those who would have helped her, and with the first impulse knelt for a moment at the foot of her crucifix, scarcely to pray, she was too bewildered for that, but the very act was a silent supplication. "Margaret ! Margaret ! where are you going ?" called her father, as she crossed the room. He had been sitting behind the curtains, with his

head buried in his hands, but now he tottered towards her, as she opened her arms to receive him, laid his head upon her shoulder, and wept like a child. "Poor Papa!" she repeated over and over, so tenderly putting back his hair—it had turned white as snow in that moment of horror—that he looked up into her face with a sudden dread that her mind was wandering. But she was only stunned. Together the father and daughter went down into the room where they had laid Frederick. Hours had passed over Margaret in that deathlike swoon, and now the softly flushed light of dawn was coming in through the unclosed windows, and as she put back the sheet which had been thrown over the corpse, it lay full upon the ghastly face, revealing the deep gash in the cheek, and the fearful scowl on the brow, which even death's hand had not smoothed away. Mr. Hamilton shuddered as he gazed; he could scarce repress the cry of anguish that

rose to his lips, and wondered at Margaret's pale tranquillity. But for the exceeding mournfulness of her eyes, brimming with unshed tears, he would have thought her too bewildered even to feel. She was not that, but the certainty of his awful doom, his eternity of woe, wrapped her in too blank a feeling of horror to be expressed; and yet, "It is just! it is just," kept ringing in her heart, an unspoken tribute to the outraged majesty of God, a protest against any wild questioning of Providence which might flit through her tortured mind. "Margaret, dear! Do not look so strange," said her father at last, drawing her away. "Come and rest! Let us go from this fearful sight!" As if it could be shut out by closed doors, or driven away by sleep! It was before Margaret day and night for months.

"Where is Alice?" she asked, "I must go to her now. Try and rest, Papa, I will come to you again."

Alice was pacing her chamber, moaning, and wringing her hands in uncontrollable woe. She would not be comforted. No words that Margaret could speak would soothe her; there was little indeed of comfort in them, for what hope was there to give? She felt too utterly desolate herself to do more than win her to rest by the gentlest caressing. It did its work at last, that tender touch of hands and lips to the hot feverish brow of the widowed girl, and she slept from very exhaustion. Margaret could not do that, she felt that others must be thought of before self. With a slow, firm step, as if nerved for all that might come, she crossed the hall to Hortense's chamber. Her night lamp was still burning, the curtains of her bed undrawn. She put them back, to see the dark cold face, haughtier and more scornful now that the proud will which kept every nerve in subjection was at rest. They were free now, and the thin lips moved, and the

heavy brows contracted, as if with some troubled sleeping fancy. Margaret thought she was at last touched, that her icy nature was at last thawed, and scarce conscious of her act, grasped one jewelled hand that lay on the counterpane. "O Hortense! Is it not awful? Are you not sorry for your Papa?" That thought was uppermost, through all to make her father happier. Mrs. Hamilton's eyes unclosed, and then her face wore its usual impenetrable look.

"Marguerite, why did you wake me? I can be of no use, nor you either. Let the servants attend to Frederick. I am sure while he was alive he did not overwhelm us with attentions. Go to bed, child! go to bed!" She turned away, and composed herself to sleep again.

A sudden stilling of her heart, then a quickening throb that sent the blood madly through every vein, and Margaret's calmness was broken down. At last the tears came,

a little burning flood, but it was better than the rigidity that was settling on her pale young face. She fled to her own room, and barring the door, knelt there before the cross, and the Mother of sorrows, sobbing but those two dear names, "Jesus! Mary!" It was the prayer of a bruised human heart, and He who cried aloud in his bitter agony, and she who stood in speechless sorrow at the foot of His cross, refused not to hear. Other words were needless, they were more powerful than all others could have been, and Margaret, kneeling there, asking nothing, but only clinging in her helplessness to the feet of Jesus, felt strength returning, and calmness, and the quiet thoughtfulness for others, which had for a while been stifled by selfish grief. She went to her father again, and then for the first time noticed the change that one night had made, the whitened hair, and the lines ploughed in his forehead, and the helpless weakness of his gait. He looked

as if years of desolation had passed over him.

All that long bright May-day, while the sun gladdened the earth, and the soft wind was busy unfurling the leaves, Margaret and her father, and Alice, sat together sharing and soothing as best they might each other's sorrows. Hortense came in once or twice, but did not stay long; it was no place for her, that still, darkened chamber. with its stricken mourners, and whenever Ally's bursts of passionate grief were calmed, and Mr. Hamilton forgot in the sleep he so much needed, that death was his guest, Margaret went down to look at her brother, and weep in hopeless sorrow over him. But never for a moment doubting that he had carved out his own awful destiny, never forgetting that his own hand had sent his sin-laden soul before the tribunal of God, or that it was more just to deplore the outrage he had offered the Deity in madly casting back the

boon of life, than the injury he had done himself. All this was distinct in thought and belief, and yet human feeling could not keep back the mournful cry, "O brother! brother!"

And so the day went by slowly and wearily enough. In the evening, when Margaret went to Hortense, she was trying on her mourning dress. "It was really a provoking thing for Fred to do," she said petulantly; "I look like a mulatto in black, but thank goodness, he is only a stepson, and I need not wear it long."

VIII.

THE CRASH—ADVERSITY.

The funeral was over. Wondering acquaintances had come and sat in the darkened parlor, and a few more intimate friends had, with unavailing kindness, tried to comfort Alice and Margaret, and an Episcopalian minister had spoken long, and perhaps, to other ears, eloquently, upon the uncertain tenure of life. But Margaret was thinking all the while of a grand, solemn, funeral service, full of mystic meaning; the sorrowful but not hopeless cry of the Miserere; the incense mounting like prayer; the blessed lights, and above all, the "Lamb

without stain," offered up as a victim of propitiation for the departed soul, and to her the finely rounded sentences were very cold and meaningless. Why speak of the "blessed hereafter," as if he who lay in his coffin, stark and cold, had any claim to that ; as if they who wept for him were like them to whom the apostle said, "Mourn not like those who have no hope." Almost sick at heart, she turned away.

But, it was all over now. The hearse had borne its lifeless burden to the grave ; the long line of carriages had dispersed, and the mourners were once more at home. How bleak and dreary it seemed! Alice, worn out with grief, went to sleep very soon ; Mr. Hamilton was like a child in Margaret's hands. She soothed him into quietude, and as Hortense had gone to her own room, was left alone to face the desolation that seemed gathering around. A weight had suddenly fallen upon her spirits,

so crushing their lightness and mirth, that she felt they could never again be so buoyant. Years could not have given that young heart more experience, or a clearer insight into the circumstances of life, than those few hours of intense suffering; nor could all the wisdom or philosophy of this world have so nerved her to bear the heavy load being lain upon her shoulders, as her silent, helpless clinging to the cross. Her faith was the only bright spot in the cloudy sky, the only island in the raging waters; and, as it had been in prosperity the very sunlight of her life, the source of all her happy light-heartedness, so now, in the hour of adversity, it was her only comfort, her only hope.

One day, about a week after her brother's death, Margaret sat alone in the back room, which had always been her favorite haunt. The piano had been closed since that fatal night, and the flowers she had held in her

hand, when Etienne led her there, still lay on the floor, withered and scentless. Mr. Lamar had just told her good-bye, perhaps for ever, as he had said once before; and she was wearily folding up the work she had been busy with, for it was the hour at which she usually visited the cathedral. Before she was done, her father came in with a wild, haggard look, that reminded her of her dead brother.

"Papa, are you ill? Has any thing happened?" was her hurried greeting. He passed his hand over his forehead, with a bewildered air, saying, bitterly, "It has come at last! Margaret, it has come! Do not leave me!" He grasped her hand, as if fearful she would go.

"I am not going away, papa. Tell me what troubles you?"

"Oh! I am ruined, child! To-morrow, there are thousands of dollars due; bills to be paid that I cannot put off, and here is

all I have." He dashed a handful of gold coins on the floor, and trampled upon them as he strode up and down with faltering step. "Oh! fool that I have been, to lavish and waste on Hortense, and keep nothing for you. Margaret, she will never be able to bear this. What shall I do?".

"Whatever is most just, papa! Have you not property enough to satisfy your creditors?"

"No. All that is worth any thing is gone. I have sold it by piecemeal, with the vain hope of warding off this calamity, and to gratify Hortense's whims. I have never had courage to refuse her any thing. Every costly bauble she craved, I have given; every extravagant desire I have gratified; and then, Frederick, sometimes by frank avowals of his degrading situation, sometimes by forging my name to notes, which I paid, rather than expose him, helped to drain the coffers that Hortense, in

her insolent pride, still thinks full to the brim.

"I have absolutely nothing, Margaret, but those few petty hundreds, and some lots in the western part of the city. They will be worth an immense sum in a few years; but I must give them up, I suppose."

"And there is the homestead, papa, and this home with the furniture, surely altogether will be enough to pay your debts."

"You have no idea of their amount, dear. It will not do. Do you think, child, I would suffer them to touch the homestead? It has been yours for years; they cannot suspect me of the meanness of giving it to you now, to save it from the general wreck. No! no! It shall not be touched."

"Oh! papa, indeed, I care little for it, if it will help you. Let them take all, papa; it is but just. We will be happier without the wealth that makes so much

misery and distrust in the world. You and I, papa, can surely make a comfortable living for Alice and Hortense. You do not know how I can work, papa."

"Hortense!" he exclaimed, with a bitter laugh. "She will never consent to leave this house for an humbler one; to pass day after day in the dull monotony of duty. Margaret, you are a noble-hearted girl, and cannot understand her nature. Even I, after years of experience, can never believe it as callous and ungrateful as it seems. She will not offer to give up that which she may lawfully claim, as you have done. Mark me, child! she will say this house and all its glittering gewgaws are hers.

"Oh! the terrible disgrace of this failure! If I could but have avoided it!" he added, vehemently. "I have seen it coming for months, Margaret, and have

tried to defer it, at least for your sake. All this sorrow will so darken your life."

"No, papa," she said, quietly. "The light of life does not come from exterior causes. Do not be sorry for me. I shall bear it very well. Only I hope you will be able to do justice to all."

He shook his head despondingly, while she stooped to gather up the scattered gold. "Margaret," he said, after a moment's silence, "will you go to Hortense for me? Tell her all, dear; do not palliate the evil. Perhaps it will waken her up." She saw that in spite of his assurance to the contrary, he still hoped this dark hour of affliction would prove his wife not unworthy of all the affection he had lavished upon her, and with a silent kiss she left him, to try her utmost to stir up Hortense's stagnant feelings, if that was at all possible.

Mrs. Hamilton was listlessly turning over the fashion plates of a magazine when she

entered her room. "Marguerite! what have you been doing all the morning? Come and see these lovely styles. Is not that mantle graceful? It would suit you to perfection; but I suppose they will not come out for mourning. I have been to Wade's to-day, ordering a beautiful piece of India muslin for you—you can't wear heavy mourning in summer—and it will be very becoming trimmed with black. What does Mr. Hamilton say about taking us to Niagara next month."

"Nothing. But I know there is no possibility of his doing so," said Margaret. "Hortense, put that away for a moment, I want to tell you something. Do you know that papa has lost every thing he is worth in the world? To-morrow his name will be blazoned over the city as a bankrupt."

She spoke abruptly, hoping to startle Mrs. Hamilton. But the dark face was perfectly still. "A bankrupt? Well,

that certainly is a pretty pass to come to! What is he going to do now?"

"Oh! Hortense, what can he do but give up all he has, and be at least just in as much as he can; and then, with our assistance, begin the world anew. He is very old for that," she added, with a sigh. "If I could prevent this necessity; if my unceasing labor could procure him rest for the years that remain, I would be indeed blessed."

"That is just like your usual romance, Marguerite," said Hortense, scornfully. "Well, *I* shall not do that. He had no business marrying again if he could not support a wife. One blessing! This house is mine; it was bought in my name, and the furniture too; so they, of course, cannot be touched. And the homestead is yours, but the rent of that will only support you in very democratic style. And what will I do? I declare it is abominable!"

"Yes, the house is yours!" said Margaret, with a sorrowful glance around the spacious and gorgeous chamber. "It was papa's marriage gift, was it not?"

The proud woman winced under Margaret's unconscious irony. "Hortense," she said, presently, "come and tell papa that you do not care very much about it. We have all helped to ruin him. There has been too much extravagance."

"Did he say that?" interrupted Mrs. Hamilton, quickly.

"Can you not see that there has been?" asked Margaret. "Thousands spent for our dress, for parties and pleasures that were called such, but were really none. And then, Fred!" she added, with a burst of tears. "Hortense, if you have a heart at all, you must feel for papa now. Come to him!" She seized her hand eagerly, and would have led her to the door.

"No, Marguerite. It is his place to come to me; I have never wronged him."

She saw it was a hopeless task; her entreaties would be of no avail, and she went down again with an expression on her face that told her father her ill success, before her words confirmed it.

"Never mind, dear," he said, as if worn out with long-enduring suffering. "You are my all now! Go and walk, Margaret, it is very pleasant out."

"Can I not do any thing for you, papa?"

"Not now," he answered with a kind of quiet resignation that had become habitual, "I can do nothing myself yet, I must rest."

There was but one walk she cared to take, one point to which her heart was attracted, the dark old church; and there she went, hurrying through the few thronged squares she had to traverse on Fourth street, and up the less frequented ones on Sycamore, as one bent on a mission of life and death. She

longed to be within those consecrated walls—shut in from all the grief and anxiety that had so suddenly come upon her. And when safe there, kneeling on the steps without the rail, she wept such tears as a grieved child might shed in the arms of its best friend. She was alone with *her* Friend, without thought of any other presence, and in spirit laying her aching head on his adorable breast, she sobbed herself into quietude. It was rest indeed! And more than the deepest repose; for after the gush of tears, the almost uttered cry of pain, came the full tide of consolation. It was as if she had been folded in so close an embrace that she could feel every pulsation of his mighty heart, as if his divine lips had been pressed upon her brow, and stilled for ever its feverish throbbings; as if the voice which awes into silence the angelic choirs of heaven was soothing her in low, tender accents. Those few swift-passing moments of intense delight,

were cheaply purchased by the trials she had gone through, and when she rose to go, it was with a conviction that years of torture would not be too much to win such peace again. She could face, now, the seemingly impenetrable darkness before her. The dreary life, the weight of care, she felt must hereafter rest upon her.

The announcement of Mr. Hamilton's failure created a sensation which would not be understood now. Such things were not the every day occurrence; men had not grown perfectly shameless in their robberies; there were no so-called bankers filling their pockets with the wages of honest laborers, and leaving instead, empty vaults and worthless bonds; no merchants revelling in princely pomp, while those whom they defrauded, dragged out lives of want and misery. Pearl

street was in an uproar, and the fashionable romenades on Fourth had quite an exciting heme for conversation.

Mr. Hamilton, writhing under the merest glance he met, shunned every one as much as possible, and even Hortense, with all her insolence, felt it necessary to keep the house for a few days. But, at last, it became an old thing,—wonder and surprise died out. The creditors met, and took all that was to be had, scarce more than half of their dues; for the homestead and the house they occupied were legally exempted, and her father would not suffer Margaret to give up the little that she possessed; and when all was settled, she, with the energy that had been so unexpectedly called into existence, regulated things anew. The household servants were dismissed, all the plate which had belonged to her mother sold to pay their wages, and jewelry, which she had seldom worn and never cared for, disposed of, to meet their

daily expenses. Hortense was not at all satisfied with these new arrangements; they were "preposterous" and "absurd," and she seemed disposed to question Margaret's right to act the mistress in "*her house.*"

"But, Hortense, I have touched nothing of yours, I have not interfered with your comfort. We must have food, and there is no way of procuring it just now but that I have taken. And why keep servants when we have not a farthing to pay them?" was Margaret's answer to her complaints.

Mrs. Hamilton did not contradict her, but was silent and gloomy for days. She came to her husband and Margaret one day, while they were talking over their prospects. Mr. Hamilton was growing more resigned; seeing things in a pleasanter light, as Margaret's cheerful disposition was removing, one by one, the seeming difficulties in his way.

"First of all, papa," Margaret was say-

ing, when Mrs. Hamilton came in, "we must do our best to pay every cent you owe. I am sure I can find out some way of making money, and we can live on very little. Poor Ally was saying to-day, she wished she was strong enough to work too; but she must not do that. I can do her share and mine too; and if you take the clerkship they have offered you, that salary, which will be a certainty, can all be laid by towards paying your debts. Oh! we'll have a nice time. All be as busy as bees. We won't care a snap for fashionable society, will we Hortense?"

Mrs. Hamilton was silent, but her lip curled. "At least," continued Margaret, with the bright glow of enthusiasm lighting up her beautiful face, "at least we will not care for parties, and concerts, and such things. Of course, Hortense, we will always be glad to see our friends; but as we cannot entertain them as we used to, they

will hardly expect us to frequent their parties."

Mrs. Hamilton laughed. "I don't think, Miss Simplicity, that your fashionable friends will trouble you much. I hope you have other society to depend upon."

"Oh! yes," she answered; "there are plenty of pleasant people going to the cathedral, who never visit the Lanmans and Stanleys, and that set. I like them the better for it."

"Mr. Hamilton," said Hortense, when Margaret had finished, "I have been considering the ways and means of getting along since your failure, and I see but one course likely to bring comfort to either of us. I think we had better separate, each going as it may seem fit. We have never been romantically in love, so neither will feel the other's loss. I will go to New York for the summer, and rent the house—indeed the Stanleys have already engaged

it—and that will be something for me to depend upon. You and Margaret and Alice, with fewer wants will have quite as much—the homestead. I intend leaving Cincinnati in three weeks, and have told you thus early that you may make whatever arrangements you think proper." It was all spoken in her quiet measured tones; not a tremor in the clear voice, not a shadow of feeling in the cold face. Margaret was thunderstruck; she could scarcely believe she heard aright, or that Hortense was in earnest. And yet, it was a strange way of jesting.

"Have I heard all?" asked Mr. Hamilton, slowly. "Is it a divorce you want, Hortense?"

"I merely said a separation," she answered; "but of course a divorce would be better. There is so little congeniality in our dispositions, that even if prosperity returned, I hardly think we would care to

resume our present connection. It is better that we should both be free."

"It is because I am unfortunate, then, that you leave me! Because I am poor and heart-broken, and need a friend, that you desert me! Let me speak, Margaret," he continued, as she bent over him, and her tears fell fast upon his face. "I will do any thing you wish, Hortense. I do not object to a divorce; but you know I have nothing to settle upon you."

"I do not ask it," she said. "Of course you can all stay here until I go. But the Stanleys wish to come in as soon as possible after that. I will see you again, I suppose. This week I spend in Newport, and the next with Bertha Lanman."

Mr. Hamilton sat quite still until the last sound of her footsteps died on the stairway; and then, springing up, with a loud cry, "Margaret! Margaret! she has killed me!" fell in convulsions at her feet.

It was more than a week before he could leave his room after that most heartless proceeding of Hortense's, and then he was but a wreck of himself; his intellect was impaired, his health broken down. And Margaret had shed more bitter tears in that one week, than in all the years of her life before. But for the sweet knowledge of God's providence, His watchful care, His tender love, she would have been utterly crushed. She had to think and act for others now; for neither her father nor Alice were fit to do so, and that kept mind and hands busy. The divorce was procured, upon what plea she never cared to know, but it was not effected just then, not until later in the summer, when Margaret had crossed the threshold of her new self-sacrificing life.

IX.

THE CHILDHOOD HOME.

They went back to the old homestead in the glowing days of June, Margaret and her father and Alice, the three bound close to each other by the sorrows that had fallen upon them. There was a wild beauty in the place; the grass high and thickly matted; the purple and crimson and pale pink verbenas, long free from bondage, running through it as they willed, some braver than the rest peeping up here and there as if to see what was going on around them; the rose bushes weighed down by their luxuriant bloom; the honey-suckles climbing recklessly

over fences and porches and up to second story windows; and, above all, the old stately trees shading with a dreamy glare the long-deserted paths. The shadowy light was indoors too, for the dust of months had accumulated upon the windows, and spiders had hung their airy drapery from every nook and corner. The ashes of the year gone by were on the hearths, and over the floors where the frolicsome March winds had tossed them when the last occupants left; and shut in as the house was from the busy thoroughfares of the city, so far back from the very street on which it was situated, that passing vehicles could scarce be heard, it seemed like some ruin of olden times, desolate and decayed. Alice shuddered and said, "It is very dreary here."

Taking a hand of each as if leading two weary children, Margaret took them into a room which she had had cleaned and furnished. It was one her mother had used, a

bright, cheerful apartment, in the south-western corner of the house, with windows opening on both sides, so that the winter sun streamed in the whole day long, and in summer when the western shutters were unclosed, it sent its flaming light, softened by the shadows of the trees, athwart the floor. It lay there now in many a broken band, and shed an upward halo upon the walls with their dark oak wainscoting and cornices, just as when Margaret was a child, dancing after the sparkling moths, that ever eluded her grasp. The old piano stood in its accustomed place, the queer heavy table with twisted legs at which they had read in those days, and which Hortense had declared a monstrosity, stood in the centre of the room, and over the mantlepiece and against the opposite walls hung two pictures, Mr. Hamilton's gifts to his dear wife. One a St. John Chrysostom, painted by an old man with genius enough to have won

renown had the world smiled upon him. That it did not is little matter to him now, for he sleeps the sleep of death, and the cross that is planted upon his grave is an emblem of that he bore so bravely through life. Many a time Margaret had sat at his knee and listened in silent wonder to his tremulous voice as he spoke of his youth and manhood, and now, whenever she looked upon his work and recalled his broken words and sighs, she fancied he must have painted it, in some hour when the high hope of heaven had softened without obliterating earthly sorrow. There was a tender glow in the dark coloring of the picture, a sad sweetness in the lips, giving a mournful expression to that noble face, which the holy light in the deep-set eyes, and the majestic calmness of the brow, could not change.

The other was her own portrait, a joyous child, tossing among flowers scarce brighter than herself, with laughter dimpling her

glowing face, and the showers of golden hair swept back as if by the wind. They faced each other, the pictured semblance of the glorious saint of past ages, whose hair had grown white in the service of God, and who now knelt at His footstool in the rapturous bliss of that beatific vision, and the child unsullied by sin, unsaddened by care. And between them stood the living Margaret, meek in her sorrow as she had been untainted by prosperity. Immense as was the distance between them, there was an invisible link connecting the beatified saint in heaven and the lowly but true-hearted girl upon earth. "One Faith, one Father, and one God!" Perchance it was this thought that gave Margaret such sweet placidity, as she stood amid the relics of by-gone happiness, with her helpless father clinging to one hand, and her broken-hearted sister to the other.

She had brought in flowers early in the

afternoon. Many-colored roses, dark, blood-red, and pale maiden blushes, and the rich full-shaded one, between whose fragrance and beauty are things to wonder at and love; starry jessamines, and clusters of heliotrope; and had loaded the table with the books her father best loved, and on the low stand put a tiny work-basket, with the gossamer embroidery, Ally's fingers were so often busy with. Nothing was wanting, not even the worn footstools, and the lamp, with its white shade covered with vine leaves and grapes, which had been there five years before, and which Margaret had stowed away as precious things.

When Mr. Hamilton sat down in the chair she had placed for him, and bent over a book, and Alice, more worn with love than fatigue, lay white and motionless on the sofa, she stole out into the garden to be alone for a little while. The soft pur-

ple twilight was floating down like a veil over the bright face of day, and to Margaret it seemed she would thenceforth walk through life, in as dim and chastened a light. No more unshadowed sunshine for her; never again such a tempest as had just spent its fury on her path. She was content that this, or whatever else the good God willed, should be; and yet, as she walked to and fro beneath the alanthus trees, and listened to the rising wind in their branches, her very heart sank within her, and the tears so long repressed for the sake of others, would be no longer kept back, and with her arms clasped around an old tree, beneath which her mother had often sat, and her face pressed against its rough bark, she cried until the quiet stars looked down upon her through the leaves. One uncontrollable burst of grief and then the sorely-tried heart was lifted up to its only Friend,

and its throbbings were calmed as she thought of His long agony in Gethsemani.

Oh, wondrous love of the Incarnate Word! How many a human spirit is upborne on the dark waters of woe, by a glance at the olive garden, and the judgment hall, and the rugged steep of Calvary!

Margaret dried her eyes, and putting back the hair that had fallen over her face, went into the house again. Tea was untasted that night, and the lamp was not lit. The three sat close together in the shadow, while the moonlight streamed into the middle of the floor; Margaret alone speaking a few quiet, consoling words.

There was work to be done the next day; the house to be cleared of rubbish, and plans made for the future. Early in the morning, Margaret, with their one servant, for they were now too poor to keep more, began her task. The whole house was gone through, the week's work allotted

to the maid, and the few rooms they could afford to furnish, selected. And then Margaret, flushed from her exertions, started to Hortense's to pack the few things she had left in her room.

There was but a few streets to cross tc be there, but leagues of land could not have separated the occupants of the two homes more completely. The carriage was at the door when she got there, and Hortense in her travelling dress stood in the hall giving orders.

"Marguerite," she said, "I am glad you have come. I wish you would have your things moved, for the auctioneer will be here to-morrow to take an inventory, and it is better to have them out of the way. I am just starting to New York with the Wilsons."

Margaret burst into tears ; she could not help it, and Hortense seemed a little moved, only a little. "Marguerite, I did not think

you cared so much for me. Why not come with me? I will wait a day or two for you."

She could not speak, but her sad, reproachful look more than answered Mrs. Hamilton. "Well, then, good-bye! Don't forget to lock your door, if you leave any thing in the room."

Margaret went slowly up the stairs, still weeping, and almost mechanically emptied wardrobes and filled up trunks. One of the servants, the only one who remained to attend to the sale of Hortense's furniture, offered to assist her in packing, but she gently declined, and did it all herself; and when the car she had sent for came, and took away her trunks and the few articles of furniture she possessed, she hastily glanced at the beautiful and costly things her father had collected with such care, scattered in confusion every where, and went, hoping never again to cross the

threshold of that ill-starred house. She was very tired that night, and slept too soundly even to dream, and it was so for a week afterwards; her days being spent amid new household duties, and her evenings in amusing Alice and her father.

The rooms on the first floor were at last fitted up in a very simple, unostentatious style, and Margaret began to think of some way of earning a subsistence. Her father could do nothing, but was rather a drag upon her, monopolizing her time and attention as entirely as he could. He was growing more imbecile every day, and depended helplessly on her exertions. It gave her strength and courage. One day after her morning's work was done, the rooms filled with fresh flowers, Ally's pillows arranged on the sofa, and her work-stand beside it, and her father seated at his books, she went to pay her usual visit to the Cathedral. It was her only resting place; there alone was

the load of care laid down, and the sweet feeling of repose enjoyed. She had determined upon taking a school; many of her fashionable acquaintances lived in the neighborhood of her present home, and she hoped they would be willing to trust their children to her; and with a very fervent prayer for success she left the Church, to go in search of scholars. Her hopes were this time realized. No one could refuse the request so meekly made by the daughter of the once aristocratic Robert Hamilton, but each wondered exceedingly that she had courage to make it. Wondered that she who had been so courted and admired could be content in the lowly sphere she was henceforth to move in.

Margaret knew not, neither would she have cared, had she known their thoughts, but went home at noon with something of the old sparkling happiness in her face, to tell Alice she had the promise of at least a

dozen scholars. "Only think, Ally dear," she said, "what a time I will have with such a lot of little folks about me!"

They came the next day, little girls and boys, none older than ten, and some scarce four. Margaret gathered all the low chairs and stools she had, and sat with the bright-eyed children grouped around her. And so it continued through all the long summer. That quaint old school-room would have made a lovely picture. There was no stiff rows of desks and benches, no blackboard, nor any paraphernalia of learning, but always a profusion of fragrant flowers, always gushes of sunshine, and the musical murmur of sweet young voices. Margaret generally sat on a low stool in the centre of the room, surrounded by her pets, for they had soon become so; some reading from the book she held; some conning spelling lessons that seemed wonderful performances when they were learned; and others, the youngest of

the band, dancing in and out as they willed, pelting each other with roses, or in the height of a romp stopping to steal the comb from the fair Mistress's head, and laugh merrily when the heavy masses of hair fell down over neck and shoulders, and swept the floor with its rings of gold. It was not the least of their enjoyment that she had to cease her patient teaching and gather it up again, nor was it a very hard penance to be seated close beside her, their little light heads nestling against her, until some new whim would make them forget they had been so sweetly reproved.

And so the summer passed away, and the autumn, with its golden haze and brilliant skies, and the cold dreary winter, set in Alice had never recovered from the shock her health and nerves had sustained, and now, although her cheeks were flushed at times, and her soft eyes brighter than they had ever been, Margaret knew it was but

the autumn glory betokening decay. She was quietly nerving her heart to bear the new trial. One evening she had taken a short walk, and returned to find Alice weeping passionately over a book she held. It was one of those simple, touching little French books which we see so often now, but which were very rare in those days.

Margaret had brought it from Nazareth with her, and had taken it from her desk that morning, to look again over the familiar plates illustrating the gentle tenderness with which Jesus leads his weary, flagging followers over the sharp rocks and frightful precipices in their path.

"Dear Alice, you must not cry so, you will make yourself ill. Sit down here and tell me how you like my book. Is it not very sweet?"

"O! it is what I have wanted so long," she exclaimed, with a fresh burst of tears. "Margaret, we never had such things in the

cold, formal faith I was reared in. There is nothing so tender in it; all it can do for a suffering, fainting heart is to encase it in ice It shows us the Saviour so immeasurably above us, that we dare not throw ourselves into his arms ; it hides all the human tenderness that is so very alluring in Him. The very thought of it is something to rest upon."

Margaret bent down her head, and a *Te Deum*, unheard by earthly ears, went up from her full heart to the throne of God.

"Margaret, do you know that I have watched you ever since I first knew you, and have wondered what made you so different from other people. I can guess now. O, I must be a Catholic. I have not long to live, and it would be terrible to think my future life would not compensate for the sorrow of this. I must get to heaven if only for the sake of enjoying your company." She was smiling through her tears now.

It was all they said on the subject then, for Alice grew too weak to talk, and Mr. Hamilton came in and claimed Margaret' attention. But the next day the bishop came to see them, as he had often done of late, and while walking down the long path with him, Margaret told him Ally's wish. He sent her books to read, and came several times a week to give her instructions after that. He discovered that her belief in Protestantism had long since been shaken, that it was but her shrinking, timid nature had kept her from avowing it before. Her heart, softened by sorrow, had been won at last by the sweetness of that little book, and she was soon prepared for baptism. The day on which she received it, and made her first communion also, was the last on which she was able to sit up; she faded away, day by day, without pain or sickness, and when Christmas came, and she watched Margaret decking a tree for her little scho-

lars, she smiled and said, "Next Christmas I shall sing the Gloria in heaven."

The last day of December came. Another year had passed, another page in the book of life stained with tears and blotted with sin, was written in indelible characters. The bishop had said mass for them that morning, and given Alice the Viaticum, and to gratify the sick girl, the altar, with its white drapery, and evergreen deckings, was left standing. It was in the pleasant sunshiny room they used so constantly, for to the last Alice kept her place there amid Margaret's little pupils. But this day there was no murmur of childish voices, but a solemn hush, and a dim light only suffered to steal through the closed blinds. Alice liked it so. And now in the deepening gloom, herself only a darker shadow amid the shadows which the flickering firelight made, Margaret recalled the scenes of that vanish-

ing year. Alice lay on the lounge, her unnaturally bright eyes fixed upon the altar, and her lips moving as if in prayer.

"Margaret," she said, after a while, "do you remember this time last year? And Hortense's prophecy? I would like to see her once more. Did she ever return from the East?"

"I think not, I have never seen her since she left!"

"Well, write to her after I am dead, Margaret, and tell her I forgave her all the wrong she ever did me. I never spoke of it to you, but Frederick told me that it was she who first prompted him to marry me for my worthless money. I used to think it a terrible wrong, a cruel, heartless thing, to lead me into such a marriage, and I am afraid I sometimes feel very desirous of revenge. But not now, that is all gone. Tell her so, dear Margaret! Come and kiss me

now, and let me thank you for all your kindness!"

She folded her arms around Margaret's neck as she bent over her, and kissed her many times. "Where is Papa?" so she always called Mr. Hamilton.

"He is sleeping, Ally, shall I call him?"

"No, dear. Just help me to get up a little while, I feel so strong to-night. I think I can kneel long enough to say one little prayer!" Margaret was deceived by her voice. It was so clear and full she could not believe death was so near at hand, and taking the wasted girl in her arms, placed her gently upon a thick cushion, and supported her while she knelt.

"I am tired now," she said, very soon, and rose, almost without assistance, and advanced a step or two towards the lounge. A sudden change passed over her face, the peaceful look gave place to one in which joy and fear were strangely blended, and,

grasping Margaret's arm, she exclaimed, "This must be death! O Jesus! Ma—"

Before that sweet mother's name had left her lips she was dead, almost before Margaret had time to lay her back on her pillow

X.

A STRANGE VISIT.— RITA.

At the homestead the New Year came in, hand in hand with death. It was a sorrowful task for Margaret on that joyous day, to fold the grave clothes around Ally, and smooth back her soft fair hair from her forehead, and clasp her hands on her breast, and scatter over her the flowers she had watched so carefully through the cold wintry weather. Very sorrowful indeed, that not one of those who had been so profuse in their professions of friendship in the hey-day of wealth should be there now; but Margaret was not utterly friendless. Some

poor families in the neighborhood to whom she had been very kind, giving them gentle, encouraging words, when she had nothing else to bestow, came with their welcome sympathy, and did what they could. When the funeral day arrived it brought many of those sunshine friends; for very shame they could not stay away, and the humble Cathedral was graced (!) with the presence of many belonging to the fashionable world. Ally's was a very different funeral from her husband's, for with Margaret, faith lit up the darkness of sorrow, and the *requiescat in pace* sounded strangely sweet to ears that were unused to its touching pathos. Margaret almost envied the sleeper that eternal rest, and the long sandy desert of years she would most likely have to traverse before reaching it, looked longer and drearier now. But there was a strength and intensity of devotion in that young heart, which few who saw her frail

form would have guessed. Each new trial seemed but the loosening of another of those links binding her to earth.

The days passed by, each monotonously like its predecessor. Winter died in the warm embrace of spring, and then followed the gorgeous summer, lingering until autumn exiled her; and so it continued for years. In all this time Margaret heard nothing of Hortense, until one day in carelessly glancing over a newspaper she saw the announcement of her marriage to some titled European. It so startled her that her very breath seemed suspended. Her father was in the room and noticed the sudden pallor that overspread her face, and asked if she was ill. She said not, and folding the paper, put it where he could not see it, until she had an opportunity of destroying it. There was no need of giving a new blow to his already bruised

heart. She resolved to spare him this bitter knowledge.

Margaret's school increased; still, however, being composed of little ones, for as her scholars grew old enough to be placed in higher classes, she dismissed them, and their younger brothers and sisters took their places. The school-room wore the same bright look; decked with the sunshine and the flowers in summer, and in winter, lit up by the ruddy blaze in the fireplace; but the fair mistress, seated amid the children, was not the Margaret of other days. Those years of patient toil, of unrepining resignation, had subdued the gushing spirits and left their impress on her fair face. The brilliant flush of her cheeks had paled; the lips, once so constantly parted with smiles, were sadly sweet and placid now, and the eyes, so overflowing with mirthful light, seemed deeper and darker for the shadows that had dimmed them. And yet

Margaret was seldom sad, seldom looked back to the past with longing eye. She had no time for that. Her whole heart and soul were too wrapped up in the duties of the present to think much of those which could be of no avail now. To do what had to be done, to keep her heart from repining, and purify it day by day by the performance of those wearying duties that had fallen to her lot, was her sole desire now. Sometimes, indeed, when the day was over, and the soft summer twilight, or the gray evening of winter, as it may be, set in, and her father dozed over his books, while her own fingers wandered over the piano keys, playing low rambling melodies rather to lull him than please her fancy, she would take her stand in spirit upon some high point of view, and gaze down through the valley of departed years upon the joys and sorrows she had left for ever behind. It was rather a quieting than a saddening thing for her.

She could see now the dangers that beset her path in those days, the vortex of worldliness into which she might have been drawn, the temptations to which her faith might have been subjected, and no wonder that she was grateful for her escape. No wonder that the lonely heart sent up many a hymn of thanks for its very loneliness. It was cut off from the giddy world; its hopes and affections had nothing to do with the crowds peopling the fast-growing city, and so glad that a kind friend so ordained it, rested calm and secure within the arms of his protecting providence. These thoughts and feelings gave a placid sweetness to her outward bearing, which was in its way more attractive than the light-heartedness of earlier years. "It was like the sweetness the maturity of sorrow gives to the Christian soul, compared to the sweetness of sunny, generous youth."

Late one night, in the beginning of win-

ter, Margaret sat alone, bending over her work. Her father had been asleep for hours, and she remained to finish some work she could not do in the day. It was a wild night, the rain pouring down, and the wind wailing in the long avenues.

> Oh! the sorrowful sound of the winter rain!
> The smothered sob and the cry of pain,
> That came in the gusts of wind that kept
> Such weary vigils while mortals slept,
> On tireless wings speeding to and fro,
> As if pursued by some mighty woe,
> That tracked them on in their hurried flight,
> Through the long, lone, solemn hours of night.

In the lull of the storm, Margaret thought she heard the sound of feet on the gravel walk outside the windows; then a hand softly trying to unbar the shutters, which were fastened inside. She started to her feet and listened, but there was nothing now to be heard but the wild wailing of the wind and the dash of the rain. But in

every pause of those spirit-like voices, the same sounds came, the quick tread of feet without, and the vain effort to undo the bars; and at last, when the wind rose higher, and the rain descended in greater torrents, amid it all, she heard a voice calling "Marguerite! Marguerite!" There was but one person in all the world who had ever called her so. In a moment she was at the door, shading her lamp with her hand, and gazing intently into the darkness. From under the dripping, leafless alanthus trees came a woman's form. She knew it was Hortense, and without speaking, drew her into the warm room, and seating her before the fire, began, with tender solicitude, to undo the wet shawl that was folded about her.

"No, Marguerite! I cannot stay. I have brought you my treasure. Take care of her, Marguerite; make her like yourself, and do not, oh! do not, in Heaven's name,

let her know all her mother's hardheartedness." She lifted up her shawl, and nestling close in her arms was a child of some two years, sleeping as calmly and sweetly as if the winter storm had not been raging around her. Margaret was too astonished to ask questions. She only kissed the little one as Hortense carefully placed it in her arms.

"I have named her for you, Marguerite, but Louis and I have always called her 'Rita.' She knows that name now. I will write to you, dear Marguerite, and tell you all that has happened. How is Alice? And where——" She hesitated, while a burning flush overspread her face.

Margaret knew what she would ask. "Papa is here with me. He is not himself, Hortense; he will never again be as you knew him. And Alice is dead. Oh! Hortense! Hortense! We have had sorrowful times. I see that grief has visited

you too," she said after a pause, looking into the thin face that had lost much of its dark haughty beauty.

She clasped her hands tightly together, and almost shuddered; but her voice had all its old calmness as she replied, "Yes, Marguerite, and therefore I come to you. I am weary of life, and to-night as we crossed the river, and I leaned over the guards of the boat for a moment, to look at the water, I felt a strange longing to plunge into its sullen, gloomy depths. I think I should find peace and rest there."

"Oh! no, Hortense. Not there! Not there!"

"Hush! hush!" she said, quickly, as Rita's head moved uneasily upon Margaret's arm. "She will wake, and I must go. Good-bye, Marguerite. Take care of her, and may God bless and prosper you."

One hasty, passionate kiss on her child's cheek, the proud head bowed for a moment

in a burst of anguish on Margaret's shoulder, and Hortense was gone. Out into the darkness and storm, she knew not whither.

Margaret carried Rita up to her room, and gently undressed her. Her clothes were made of the richest materials, and around her little plump neck, was a slender chain with a locket attached, in one side of which was Hortense's miniature, and in the other, that of a stern, proud-looking man. It was, she supposed, her husband. Margaret unfastened the trinket and replaced it with a miraculous medal, murmuring softly to herself, "She is my child now, and I give her to you, oh Holy Mary! Let her purity and innocence plead for Hortense. Oh Mother! *our* Mother! obtain her grace."

In the morning when she awoke, the child was playing with her long bright hair, which had fallen down in the night. "Mamma! mamma!" she said, as Margaret

raised her head; but, with a hasty glance, shrank back, fixing her dark eyes upon her with a piercing look, that made her exceedingly like her mother. "No! no!" she said, pettishly, as Margaret tried to take her in her arms; "mamma!" It was long before she could prevail upon her to come to her; but at last it was accomplished, and dressing her, she went down to breakfast. Her father was waiting impatiently, and with the air of a spoiled child, asked what had kept her so long.

"My little pet would not get up," she said, drawing Rita from behind her, where she clung to her dress, peeping out with a wild, elfish look in her black eyes.

"Who is that?" he asked. "She looks like some one I have seen. Come here, little girl, and tell me your name."

"I do not think she can, papa," Margaret said. "It is Rita Vonderberg, Hortense's child," she added, softly, with a

quick glance at her father's face, fearful that he would be startled.

But he looked very quiet and undisturbed. "Rita Vonderberg! And who is Hortense?"

"Do you not know, papa?"

"No. I forget, I used to know so many people."

Those years were then but a dark blot on the tablet of memory! Margaret scarce knew whether to rejoice or grieve—it saved him much bitter sorrow, but it was a new proof of his daily increasing imbecility, and that was certainly not cheering for her. When Margaret's scholars came in, they were astonished to find a new playmate. Rita was now the youngest among them, and before an hour was over, she was quite at home in the busy little throng, going from one to another, peeping over their shoulders, and exclaiming at the pictures in their books. Mr. Hamilton was delighted

with her. Young as she was, there was a fearless look in her eyes, and a kind of sly daring in all her movements which was very attractive. But it made Margaret tremble for the trust that was reposed in her. Not many days elapsed before she discovered that it would require all her strength to guide that wayward little spirit. The mother's strong, proud, unbending will was in that tiny form, with a passionate temper Hortense could scarce even have possessed. For a while, there was no taming the wild impulses of the child. She would start up from a long, silent fit of musing, and dance about over chairs and tables, and finally land herself on the piano, or perhaps, the high back of Mr. Hamilton's chair, and sit there, with her straight black hair dangling about her face, and her eyes, those dark, flashing, wilful eyes fixed with the most unshrinking determination upon Margaret's grave face.

And often in winter, when the snow was falling, she would dart out into the garden with wonderful dexterity, eluding all pursuit, and come in, her hair powdered with the white flakes, and her apron full of snow to throw in the fire, that she might hear it splutter. "Let the child alone," Mr. Hamilton would say ; but Margaret watched, with anxious solicitude, the growth of that impetuous nature, and tried to subdue it. Gradually Margaret's gentle but firm will gained the ascendency, and Rita yielded to her almost instantly when her wishes were expressed. She was a loving little creature, clinging with tenacity to those who watched over her. "Mamma Margaret"—so she called her—was the very light of her young life; and it was beautiful to see them together, the quiet, subdued girl, on whose face was the impress of long-endured sorrow, and the radiant child, all life, all fire and spirit. Beautiful to see the two in that

dim old Cathedral, bowing before the altar when the faint light of morning struggled in the windows, or the shadows of the evening gathered. Day after day they walked there, hand in hand, in the cold wind and rain and sleet of winter, and the glow and beauty of summer time, until Rita came to love the place with a deep, abiding affection. It was, indeed, the "holy of holies," the dwelling-place of that Mighty Mysterious Father, whom she was learning to love with all the strength of her soul, whose presence filled her young mind with strange thoughts and desires.

And so the years passed by. Margaret growing more detached from the world, and Rita, with eager delight, yet all-unconscious of her own work, developing under her care the warm, pure affections of her heart, and the powerful intellect God had given her. She had a wonderful voice, for one so young; strong, and rich, and clear

as a flute, and many a time in the still summer evenings, when she stood on the garden gate, swinging to and fro in careless glee, and singing away with the artless freedom of childhood, passers-by would stop to listen and wonder at the melodious strains. She was there one evening, quite late, when Margaret was busy with her father, singing as usual from the fulness of a happy heart. A lady dressed in black passed down the opposite side, paused a moment, and hurriedly crossed over. Presently the astonished Rita was in her arms, and kisses were showered upon her face.

"Rita! Rita! I know it is my child. Look at me, Rita. Do you not know your mother?"

The child gazed thoughtfully at her for a moment, and said, "I don't know you, but you look like the pretty picture mamma I've got. Come in and I'll show her to you."

"Is Marguerite home?"

"My mamma Marguerite is. Do you know her? And so is papa home. Come in."

"No! no!" she said, starting back at that. "I cannot, if he is there. Tell Marguerite to come out."

"Rita! Rita!" called Margaret from the other end of the long walk. "Come in, dear, it is getting dark."

Hortense took the child's hand, and led her slowly and thoughtfully up the path; and when they reached Margaret, silently, reverently, as if she was an angel, knelt down and kissed the hem of her dress. She knew her immediately, although it was a strange attitude for the once haughty Hortense.

"Oh, Hortense! I am glad to see you once more. Why do you act so strangely? Dear Hortense, get up." She put her

arms around her to raise her from her lowly position.

"No, Marguerite. Not until I have thanked you for all your goodness, and implored your pardon for all the wrongs I have done you."

"Hush! dear Hortense. You must not speak so. Rita, it is your mother. Come in."

"No. I will never again darken your home with my ill-omened presence. Look at me, Marguerite, and see if there is not that written in my face which tells of a terrible tale of remorse. I have been frightened at my own guilt. Frederick and Alice! Oh, Marguerite, but for me they might still have been living. And your father's broken heart! And your own darkened life!"

"Alice, on her death-bed, bid me tell you she forgave all the wrongs you ever did her," said Margaret, gently. "Come

in, Hortense. Papa will not know you," she added, sadly. "He has long since forgotten all that has happened when we lived together."

"Alas! alas! that is my work too, Margaret. Can you ever forgive me?"

"As freely and fully as I hope in the great judgment day to be forgiven my own transgressions," she said, solemnly.

"Marguerite," Hortense said, directly, "once more I give you my Rita. You will never see me again on this side of the grave. Good-bye. Kiss me, Rita."

Their farewell was spoken then in the solemn, quiet starlight beneath the rustling leaves, their last farewell, for they met no more on earth.

XI.

HORTENSE'S LETTER.

When the summer days were waning, a letter came from Hortense. "Marguerite," it began, "I will write now as I promised. It is of a sad yet joyful episode in my life I have to tell; the joy sent from heaven, and the misery all of my own making. I shudder when I look back now to the days of our prosperity, and go over, one by one, —for I force myself to do that—the unfeeling acts, the cold, deliberate heartlessness of every thought. It seems almost inhuman now, and but for the new faith I have found I would lie down and die, despairing

of forgiveness. Marguerite, I am a Catholic. I can see you as you read that sentence, the glad flush suffusing once more your pale cheeks, and the light growing deeper in your eyes, and my own heart grows lighter with the thought of the happiness it gives you. I have never before brought you any thing but sorrow.

"I married again, as you know, after that fatal divorce; married one who brought me the wealth, without which I thought life useless, a titled name, and, as I thought, affection enough to humor every caprice of mine. It was not so. He was proud and passionate, and would not be ruled, and I knew not how to yield, so we led a miserable, quarrelsome life. When my little Rita was born, it seemed to me the first gush of human feeling I had ever known flooded my heart, and then I thought of you, Marguerite, and all your goodness, and patience, and love. In my dreams I saw you, and

all my waking reveries carried me over the ocean, and across the mountains to my old home in the West; and amid the darkness and desolation I had helped to bring there, you stood, like an angel of light, cheering and guiding the helpless, heart-broken ones I had deserted. It was enough to make me hate myself, and no wonder I tried to close my eyes to the vision of pure unselfish devotion that haunted me. It would not depart; I was proud to see and think of it, and now I thank God it was so, for at last it awakened my soul from the fearful lethargy of sin and incredulity. It was in London all this happened. I was walking one evening with Rita and her nurse, when we passed a Catholic Church. The people were crowding in, and nurse said, 'Please ma'am, it's benediction they're going to; would you like to go in?'

"I had never before thought of your

religion as having an influence upon your conduct ; my own had never interfered with my whims ; but now it suddenly flashed upon me that it was the stern requisitions of your faith that so purified you from worldliness and deceit. I remembered your refusal to marry Etienne ; your prompt, energetic determination to have justice done to Mr. Hamilton's creditors ; your tender care of Alice in all those terrible trials, Frederick's death and burial, loss of wealth and health ; all with lightning speed passed through my mind with the half-spoken words, 'Marguerite is a Catholic.' We went in ; my servant kneeling reverently in the aisle, and I standing aloof, for my pride was not yet conquered. But as the sweet, plaintive voices in the choir sang to an organ accompaniment, and the crowd bent in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, I knelt too, as if forced down by invisible hands. I cannot explain it to

you, Marguerite, but in the solemn hush that came upon the multitude, as the music died in soft cadences, and the Host was raised, that peace I had so long sought in vain stole over me. 'It is well to be here, I thought; and when it was finished, I sent Rita and the nurse home, and remained until they came to close the church. I stood without; listened to the drawing of the heavy bolts, and *then* I could imagine how Adam and Eve must have felt when the gates of Eden were closed upon them. But the new Paradise I had found was not barred for ever. Day after day I returned, each time feeling more unwilling to leave the quiet, solemn resting-place, and all the while conviction slowly forcing itself upon my yet unwilling mind. I read constantly the books of the Church, until at last I dared not oppose my pride to her truth. It was thus, Marguerite, that I was, foolishly

resisting grace, almost dragged into the ark of safety.

"And then came poverty and distress, as if to try my new-born faith; and in my tribulation I went to America, and made my way to Cincinnati, and gave my Rita to you. I had to fly again across the ocean, for one I dared no longer see pursued me. And so many weary years dragged on, lighted only by the faith I had given such tardy welcome to. Rita's father has been dead a long, long while, Marguerite, and I am now striving to atone for a misspent youth. To-morrow I go to France to enter a convent of the Sisters of Charity. I have chosen this to punish the insolent pride of other days. Nursing the sick and dying, amid scenes of woe and crime and desolation, will, I hope, humble my still revolting nature. I only wonder that God has called me to it, that he will suffer one so vile to minister to His beloved, the poor

and unfortunate of earth. Do not blame me for leaving you now. I have consulted others, and, almost for the first time in my life, have not suffered a single thought of self to prevent me from following the advice of the wise and good. Mr. Hamilton does not need me now, he is in far better hands; and, Marguerite, I dare not again trust myself amid the old scenes, lest they might bring back the old selfish and unpitying feelings. No, no; it is best that I should not return to you.

"And now, Marguerite, I have but one thing to ask. I need not say any thing of Rita; for I know that she is very dear to you, and you will lead her to heaven, where God grant I may one day meet you both. My only desire is that you will pray for me, and never mention my name to your father. You say he has forgotten me, and it is best not to waken memory. Do not write. Now that I have deserted the world, I would

rather have no link binding me to it, not even your affection, dear Marguerite. Once more farewell, and may Jesus and His Blessed Mother keep you and your father and Rita in peace and happiness."

Little Rita was nestling in Margaret's lap, and as she folded the letter, a gush of tears fell upon the child's face. It was such an unlooked-for joy. She had, with all her desires, scarce hoped that Hortense would be a Catholic, and now grace had worked the miracle. She could think of nothing for days after but that one blissful piece of knowledge. If her father would but do likewise! But there was little prospect of that. He was too childish and imbecile now to be taught what a child might learn.

The glowing October was passing away, and as the new cathedral was to be consecrated on All Saints day, the Catholics of Cincinnati were in a very joyful kind of

excitement. They had eagerly watched the edifice, as it slowly rose from foundation to roof, and now were anxious to enter into it. Some one said to the Bishop when, trusting to Providence, he began the immense work, "Where do you expect to find people to fill such a building?" It is almost finished now; the beautiful cross-surmounted spire points up to heaven; the stately colonnade surrounds the tower, and the broad flights of steps are daily nearing completion; but in the ten years since its consecration, other churches, some nearly as large, have been erected for the crowds of worshippers who cannot find place in it.

The day came at length, but in clouds and gloom. The rain poured in torrents, and yet, the faithful flocked in crowds, filling every available spot about the church, until the doors were opened. Margaret, with Rita, passed through the Bishop's house, and went up into one of the tribunes,

from whence she could look down upon the sanctuary, and the body of the church. It was a sea of heads, swaying to and fro, parting and uniting again, like waves, as the long procession of ecclesiastics passed through. Many stood that day before the new altar, raised to the living God, who have since stood at his judgment seat—the Venerable Bishop Flaget and saintly Father Badin, those brave pioneers of the faith who planted the cross on the banks of our bright Ohio; Archhishop Eccleston, and Father Ellet, whose royal majestic eloquence made one involuntarily think of the grand old Fathers of the distant palmy ages. And many, too, amid the swaying crowds outside the sanctuary, have bowed to the great immovable decree. Some with friends and all that could make life dear; some weary and worn, and glad to rest. And one, good, and noble, and loving the desolate orphans of the Church, who have

learned to bless his name, true to his generous nature, stood to the last on the deck of the Arctic, amid the helpless, and went down in the fathomless waters, when they closed above the ill-fated vessel.

Margaret was absorbed in the ceremonies; they were new to her, and very beautiful, and replete with a meaning none but truly Catholic hearts can appreciate. Once, as she raised her head, she saw Etienne Lamar in the opposite tribune, kneeling reverently with clasped hands, and his eyes fixed on the cross they were placing upon the tabernacle. A little while after, she saw him bless himself, and then she knew he too was a Catholic. It was a new joy, and a glad, quick heart-throb sent her thanks to heaven. But it was too quiet a pleasure to distract her; she did not look again; it was enough to know that he was at last within the Church; and when late in the afternoon the ceremonies were finished, she

hurried out to escape the crowd, without waiting to meet him.

He came a few days after to see them It was during school-hours, and one of the children, who had been in the garden, admitted him, and led him immediately to the school-room. He stood in the doorway some minutes, watching the groups before him. In the corner of the wide hearth sat Mr. Hamilton, bent down over a book, while a roguish, blue-eyed child, who had climbed up on a chair behind him, twisted his grey hair into fantastic curls. Margaret was in the centre of the room, listening to the recitations of a row of boys and girls who stood before her ; and Rita, with just enough of flashing light in her deep, hazel eyes to make them wondrously beautiful, walked to and fro, marshalling a younger set into ranks for the next lesson. "Who is that ?" she suddenly asked, in her clear voice, as she caught sight of Etienne.

Margaret looked up, and the next moment both her hands were in his, and she was, with all the graceful freedom of their first acquaintance, welcoming him to her home. He sat there, the rest of the afternoon, with Mr. Hamilton, talking and reading softly to him, but glancing often at Margaret as she pursued her duties, the old flush rising to her cheeks as she saw how earnest he was watching her movements.

And in the evening after tea, when she had closed the shutters and lit the lamp, and stirred the fire into a ruddier blaze, they sat together, talking a little sadly of old times. She told him how they had first come to the homestead, with what sweet resignation Alice had died, and then of Hortense's conversion.

"And this is her child," he said, drawing Rita from Margaret's side, where she always stationed herself. "There is something very like her mother in those dark eyes. How old is she?"

"Just ten," Margaret said.

"Then, I am sure, I saw both her and Hortense many years ago in London. I was in a church, assisting at Benediction, and in coming out, was struck with the appearance of a lady kneeling in the aisle. She looked so like Hortense, I was tempted to stop and speak to her, but then thinking it improbable that she would be there, I passed on."

"Yes; it was she, I am sure," Margaret said. "And have you been a Catholic so long? You have not yet told me how you became one."

He smiled. "Can you not guess? I will tell you all about it some other time. Come and sing for me, now."

"Oh, I only play second fiddle since Rita has been learning music. Come, Rita, I will sing second for you."

The child sprang to the piano, and fluttering over the leaves of a music-book,

until she found a piece she liked, placed it before Margaret. It was an old Gipsy song, which she particularly fancied; it suited her rich, clear voice, and very beautiful was the blending in of Margaret's low, gushing second, with those wild cadences as they rang through the quaint old room. They sang a long time, and then finished with the sweet plaintive Ave Sanctissima; for Margaret never suffered Rita to leave the piano without singing some little strain to the Blessed Mother, to whom she was consecrated. Were Etienne's dark eyes full of tears that they glistened so when he lifted his head from his hands?

"You have only changed outwardly, Margaret," he said, as he bid her good night. "The old joy is in your heart, subdued perhaps, but still there; the old tranquillity and trust in God; else you could not so have sung that beautiful hymn."

He came very often after that, almost

every day, until it became a matter of course with Margaret's scholars to see him seated at the fire with Mr. Hamilton, amusing the old white-haired man. All winter the most fragrant flowers bloomed in the sunny windows. Rare southern plants, too tender for a northern climate, seemed to flourish in that warm bright spot. Etienne loved nothing better than to see Margaret morning and evening bending over his beautiful gifts, her pale face contrasting with the rich hues of leaves and blossoms. She was to him the childish Margaret he had known so many years before, save that the sweetness of her manner had a tinge of sadness now, when it used to be all mirth and smiles. The quiet, trusting frankness, the unconcealed pleasure in his society, were the very same as in that first happy winter, before she had tasted the cup of sorrow.

And so the winter months passed by, and Easter came decked in the robes of spring

They had been to St. Xavier's Church, as the old Cathedral was now called, to late benediction. It was one of those delicious evenings, when every breath of air seems freighted with some message from fairer and brighter climes; when the starlight rests most lovingly upon the earth, as it calmly sleeps in the soft hazy atmosphere, and it is not hard to fancy one can see the leaves of tree and shrub expanding every moment.

"Do not go in, Margaret, it is so delightful here," Etienne said, as they entered the long avenue. They walked up and down the many winding ways, Rita, who was, as usual, with them, dancing before and singing some merry carol.

"Mr. Lamar," Margaret said, after a long silence, "you promised to tell me how you became a Catholic; will you not do it now?"

"Yes, Margaret; you have a right to know, for, next to divine grace, you were the means of making me one."

"I!" she exclaimed, in utter astonishment.

"Yes, and very unintentionally—quite as much so," he added, with a smile, "as you captured my heart once upon a time. Margaret, you were so very different in those days from any I had ever met, for I had never been much in Catholic society. With all your gayety, there seemed to be a deep, immovable repose about you, as if you rested on something more than worldly prosperity, or human affection. I can understand it all now—I can feel how the glorious invisible society, amid which we Catholics live, creates an atmosphere around us which is incomprehensible to those who do not enjoy it; but then, Margaret, it was an enigma to me; and my curiosity to discover why you were thus, was so aroused, that I determined to gratify it at all costs; and after the last terrible scenes in Hortensia's house —forgive me that I recall them—I went to

Europe, knowing just enough of Catholicity to long for a deeper knowledge. Then Margaret it was that your image fled; then as I saw more and more clearly the severe majestic beauty of the Church, unscarred by persecution, unsullied by sin, I forgot the human love that first led me to seek her. The years since then have been very happy. I have had an object to gain, an aim for all my endeavors. When I returned to Cincinnati last fall, I heard for the first time of your misfortune, and also your self-forgetting devotion. Margaret, I have told you all, there is but one thing more I must add before we part to-night. There is no longer the bar to our union you once spoke of, we kneel now at the same altar. May we not labor together in this life to attain the more perfect one hereafter?"

Margaret did not speak, but bent her head upon the hand that rested on his arm. It was very sweet to be loved, very like a warm

gush of the old earthly happiness coming back again. She had lived so long detached from others that the very novelty was fascinating. And there was no harm in yielding to it; not a shadow of wrong in suffering her heart to admit that sweet human affection; and for a while all the brightness of the past flushed over her path, lighting up with a transient flush of glory, the soft twilight that had long hovered over it. Only for a little while. When Etienne spoke to Mr. Hamilton of his wishes, the childish old man said he would never consent.

"Margaret! Margaret! You told me you would never desert me," he said piteously to her.

"She shall not leave you, Mr. Hamilton," Etienne said, "I will come here, and live with you."

"No! no! I do not want you, Margaret must not marry. Promise, dear, that you will not! What can Rita and I do without you?"

He grew so excited, the very thought seemed to trouble him so much, that she promised what he asked. Etienne in vain tried to reason with him, to persuade him to consent ; his answer was always the same. Always a closer clasp of his child's hand and an imploring look. She could not resist. "Margaret will not marry."

And so the last glimpse of mere earthly happiness faded out. Etienne went away sad but resigned, and then the calm cheerfulness she had kept up for his sake, forsook her for a while. Little Rita wondered why she knelt so long at her chamber window the night he had told her good-bye, wondered why her face was so pale, and her slender hands were so tightly clasped together.— She was looking out through the jessamine vines on the cloudless sky and the moonlit garden, and when the child fell asleep the long pent-up tears rained down. Something almost like a reproachful cry to Heaven rang in her troubled heart ; but it was

quickly silenced, and after one passionate burst of grief, she was again the quiet, unresisting Margaret, she had been for so many years; bowing humbly to the good pleasure of God, sweetly kissing the hand that smote her. It was another white fragrant blossom of resignation placed in the crown angels were weaving for her. O faithful heart! Most beautiful was thy perfect, childish abandon! But, like the patriarch of old, it was only a willingness to give up that which was dearest which was asked of her. Mr. Hamilton the next morning, as if totally unconscious of his opposition of the previous night, said gaily, when he saw Etienne coming in,

"Margaret! I wonder why you and Etienne can't make a match of it. I think you would be such a fine-looking couple. Mr. Lamar, don't you think my little Madge is beautiful?"

Etienne, with a quick smile flashing over his face, took the astonished girl's hand:

"Most beautiful, indeed, but far better than beautiful. May I have her, Mr. Hamilton? I will not take her away; I will live here with you."

"Why, that will be delightful! Margaret, let us have the wedding this week."

Scarce knowing what she did, she said, "Yes;" and quite satisfied that he had settled the matter, Mr. Hamilton went to take his walk in the garden. "Come, dear Margaret," said Mr. Lamar, with a happy laugh, "you must not recall that little consenting 'yes.' We must take your father at his word, or he will be enacting over again the scenes of last night."

And so it was arranged. They were married very quietly; and much to the astonishment of fashionable friends, who again began to flock around them, they remained in the old homestead. But the school was broken up; "for," said Etienne, "you have labored too long already Margaret, and now that you belong to me,

I must take care of you, and make you rest."

It will be twenty years next New-Year's Eve, since Mr. Hamilton and Hortense, Margaret and Etienne, Frederick and Alice, sat in the stately mansion on Fourth Street, talking of the future and the past. Little they then thought of the storms that awaited them, or the dark, lonely paths, through which they were to be led; little thought Hortense—proud, selfish Hortense Hamilton—that she would one day be a Sister of Charity, walking calm and faithful amid scenes of suffering and carnage. She is one of those whose zeal in the Crimea is winning deathless laurels in heaven.

There will be another wedding at the old homestead on New-Year's Day; our little Rita, now a gifted woman, will pledge her faith to one worthy of the trust. These changes of twenty years! The homestead

is not the same ; a grand aristocratic mansion has been erected on the north-western portion of the large park-like enclosure, and on the side facing the south a row of dwellings shuts out the sunshine from the school-room windows. And when Margaret sits there now amid her own children, only the sunset gleam rests on her head like a halo, and lends her sweet face the dazzling lightness of long ago. Seven-and-thirty her next birth-day ! One would scarcely believe her that, for she is still beautiful,—still young in heart. It will never be otherwise with her, for peace has shaded her with its wings, and the passing days but bring her nearer to her home.

THE END.

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